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Theo-Monistic Mysticism

A Hindu-Christian Comparison

Michael Stoeber

THEO-MONISTIC MYSTICISM

Also by Michael Stoeber

EVIL AND THE MYSTICS' GOD
Towards a Mystical Theodicy

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A Hindu–Christian Comparison

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For Lois, Anne and Tom

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Preface

My interest in the issues surrounding typologies of mysticism arose a number of years ago, in reading Ninian Smart's 'Interpretation and Religious Experience' and *Reasons and Faiths*. As I further pursued the subject, I was astonished to find so much written on it. There are many direct and indirect contributions to an interdisciplinary debate that has gone on for at least eighty years. Bernard McGinn's recent *The Foundations of Mysticism* attests well to this phenomenon. It includes an impressive overview of this interest, lucidly outlined in an extensive appendix that includes theological, philosophical, and comparative and psychological approaches to the study of mysticism.

This book draws upon those theologians and philosophers through whom I can best illustrate both my interpretive schema and what I take to be the most pertinent issues related to it. I focussed upon a Hindu and Christian comparison because at this point in time these are the mystic traditions in which I have the most competence and interest. The book is not intended as an exhaustive survey. To give the reader some idea of what the book is and is not about, I list the major direct and indirect influences. The scholarly: Louis Dupré, Donald Evans, Carolyn Franks Davis, John Hick, William James, Steven Katz, Julius Lipner, John Macquarrie, Terence Penelhum, Ninian Smart, Walter Stace, Evelyn Underhill, and R. C. Zaehner. The mystical: Abhishiktānanda, Jacob Boehme, Bonaventure, Meister Eckhart, Donald Evans, Aurobindo Ghose, Rāmānuja, Jan Van Ruusbroec, and Śaṅkara.

Theo-Monistic Mysticism is related in some respects to my *Evil and the Mystics' God*, which was published in 1992. Although I only refer to *Evil and the Mystics' God* once in this book, the typology developed here is implicit to my earlier work, and owes its formulation in part to the teleological perspective I see underlying coherent mystical theodicy. The structure of mystical theodicy corresponds to the framework of theo-monistic mysticism. Nevertheless, the two books remain quite distinct. Readers require no familiarity with *Evil and the Mystics' God* in order to follow the argument presented here.

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these essays. Generous financial assistance came from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which awarded me a Post-Doctoral Fellowship for 1990–2. I held this Fellowship at the Department of Religious Studies, University of Calgary. I sincerely thank the Council and members of the Department, especially Ronald Neufeldt. Also, I would like to acknowledge the support of my colleagues in the School of Religious Studies at the Catholic University of America, in particular Berard Marthaler and William Cenkner.

A number of people took the time to read and respond – in some cases quite critically – to chapters of the manuscript. I thank Brad Abernathy, William Cenkner, Margaret Chatterjee, Harold Coward, Robert Forman, Gerard Loughlin, John Schellenberg, and Terence Penelhum. In discussion, my good friends Philo Hove and Patricia Dold patiently listened to the main ideas, and pressed me to clarify and refine the typology. And Donald Evans generously provided a detailed response to the whole of a later version of the book. I appreciate his help and guidance very much.

M.F.S.

Introduction

This book proposes an interpretive framework for understanding mystical experiences. The basic approach of the mystic typology is syncretic and formative, though most of the ideas are developed in response to problems I observe in the work of various scholars of mysticism. In reaction to the limitations of contemporary explanations of mystical phenomena, I suggest an integrative interpretation that I consider to be in many respects a more consistent, unifying and fruitful explanation of mysticism.

Currently there are two dominant schools of thought on mystic typologies: constructivists view mystical experiences to be different, over-determined by the socio-religious milieu within which the mystic is immersed; essentialists insist that mystical experiences are everywhere the same, though subject to different socio-religious interpretations. In response to the problems I see in these different views of mysticism, I suggest in Chapters 1 and 2 an hypothesis that rests somewhere in between these two extremes: there are indeed different kinds of mysticism, but these types are not solely dependent upon the socio-religious history of the mystic. Although this proposal is not in itself new – R. C. Zaehner suggested the same in the 1950s – what I attempt to do in this book is clarify an experiential hierarchy that draws the various authentic mystical experiences cogently together in terms of a theistic, teleological framework.

It is suggested in this book that mystical experiences depend in certain respects upon the realities the mystic encounters, spiritual entities that in some cases are to be understood as separate and distinct from the experiencing subject. Some mystical realizations involve experiences of transcendent realities; this is a fundamental postulation of the book, one which I expect some scholars of mysticism will reject out of hand. Nevertheless, I ask the reader to be open to the possibility, at least as a tentative working hypothesis, in order to properly evaluate the explanatory power of my interpretive schema. No doubt mystical experiences are influenced in part by subjective, psychological processes that are grounded in and dependent upon the individual's socio-religious history. I recognize that the emotional and cognitive frameworks of the mystic do influence the kind of experiences she can have.

The socio-religious history of a mystic affects not only the way she will interpret the experience, but also the experience itself. Mystics cannot experience realities that are beyond their conceptual capabilities or to which they are not open. Moreover, mystics usually rely on their socio-religious frame in explaining the experiences. But in suggesting that all mystical experiences are to be understood ultimately in terms only of socio-religious phenomena, constructivist scholars of mysticism are unable to explain effectively why some mystics are heretical and why some mystical experiences are cross-culturally similar. These problems are developed in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 shows the difficulties essentialist scholars have in their attempts to explain differences between mystical experiences in terms solely of variations in interpretations of experiences. These scholars neglect the claims of some mystics and downplay the very radical conceptual differences at work in different kinds of mysticism.

The problems facing both schools of thought lead me to postulate in Chapter 1 the possibility that there are indeed different types of mystical experiences (versus the essentialists), and that some of these are not solely dependent upon subjective sources (versus the constructivists). Some mystical experiences involve the experience of non-subjective realities, entities that contribute positively to the experience. I call this view of mysticism 'experiential constructivism'. The epistemological assumptions of experiential constructivism are implicit in Zaehner's writings. I clarify these in Chapters 1 and 2, over and against my criticisms of essentialism and constructivism. Also in Chapter 2, I outline just how radically different certain mystical experiences are, focusing on two major types. The claims regarding monistic and theistic types are fundamentally different. Monistic experiences are non-dual, static and impersonal, while theistic experiences are dual, active and personal. That these conceptual differences reflect experiential diversity is supported by some mystics who espouse both possibilities of experience. In Chapter 2 I focus on Meister Eckhart's and Jan Van Ruusbroec's distinctions between the two types. Their positions on this matter, in combination with the fundamental conceptual differences, confirms Zaehner's opinion that these experiences are different in kind, not merely variations in the interpretation of a single experience type.

However, the mysticisms of Eckhart and Ruusbroec suggest a

third major experiential possibility, one which draws syncretically together theistic and monistic experiences. I call this theo-monistic mysticism. It is a type of post-monistic theistic experience, wherein the monistic mystic comes to exhibit and express elements that can only be associated with theistic mysticism. Phenomenologically, this is understood in terms of a mystic teleology of self-transformation to divinity. The monistic experience involves a movement towards realization of primary-Self, an essence that has its grounding in the very non-dual, static and impersonal essence of a personal Divine. The mystic identifies monistically with the apophatic Source; and this essential association is a purifying movement wherein the mystic becomes a unique medium of elements and energies of the cataphatic Divine. In experiencing the non-dual, static and impersonal Source, the mystic naturally comes to express distinctively and actively aspects of the personal Divine.

Theo-monistic mysticism is a typology of mysticism involving a theistic hierarchy. Moreover, it is an interpretive frame that is not exclusive to Christian mysticism. In Chapter 3 I illustrate theo-monism as it is expressed in the theology of Rāmānuja, and compare it briefly to the thought of Ruusbroec. Besides reference to Rāmānuja, Eckhart and Ruusbroec, the theo-monistic perspectives of Aurobindo Ghose, Jacob Boehme, and Abhishiktānanda are also developed in Chapters 4 and 5. Through these Hindu and Christian mystics, I provide comparative illustrations of the theistic mystic typology. Also, in Chapter 3, theo-monism is contrasted from Śaṅkara's monistic hierarchy of mysticism. There I show the weaknesses of Śaṅkara's attempt to justify lower level theistic experiences in light of conceptions of a solely monistic Divine and mystic ideal. Unlike the structural conditions in theo-monism, where monistic experiences are considered necessary in the move to a theistic ideal, Śaṅkara's monistic hierarchy is unable to affirm or reinforce the authenticity of lower level theistic realizations in terms of higher level monistic realizations. A theistic hierarchy like Rāmānuja's, on the other hand, draws monistic experiences into the framework in terms of the nature of transformative processes which are essential to the theo-monistic teleology. Theo-monism thus provides a pluralistic framework that secures the authenticity of monistic realizations.

Through conceptions of a Divine that is both non-dual and

distinctive, static and active, and impersonal and personal, theo-monism secures a typology of mysticism that authenticates and harmonizes the various mystical experiences. Chapter 4 examines these dialectical conceptions of the Divine in some depth. Aurobindo and Boehme provide a reconciliation of paradoxical divine attributes at a theoretical level, through the postulation of a mysterious primal will that issues from the essence of an active, personal Divine. In describing an eternal theogonic process, Jacob Boehme depicts this magical will as that which issues from the *Ungrund* (the unground or apophatic source). Aurobindo refers to it as *māyā*, a mysterious vital force arising from *nirguṇa* (qualityless) Brahman. Through the conjunction of this primary will with the ordinating principle that also issues from this source, the Divine becomes properly cataphatic and creative. This creative energy thus connects the apophatic to the cataphatic Divine, with all three aspects potentially experienced mystically. It also provides the vitality for creation and brings the dynamics of life. At a practical level the apophatic and cataphatic dialectic is reconciled through the theo-monistic move, wherein the mystic advances from the static purifying identity with the impersonal essence of a personal Divine, to the individual, active and personal expression of elements of the Divine. So theo-monistic mysticism gives both a theoretical and a practical bridge between apophatic and cataphatic theology.

Chapter 5 begins by focusing upon the status of numinous, paranormal, and extrovertive experiences in the theo-monistic typology. All of these kinds of experiences are considered to be preliminary to higher level monistic, theistic and theo-monistic experiences. Numinous experiences reflect the awareness of inconscient energy forces, be they phenomena of the subjective or natural world, or they involve a minimally conscious and personal will of the Divine. The ideal of theo-monism is also compatible with the possibility of other non-physical realms of existence, within which various paranormal phenomena might be explained. Extrovertive or nature mysticism, on the other hand, is the realization of a pervasive integrating force or presence of the self and the external world, which issues in an affective consciousness very much like that in theistic and monistic experiences. But it lacks the permanent transforming effects of theo-monistic experience, as well as the active moral participation of the theo-monist

in the personal divine nature. In theo-monism, extrovertive mysticism is considered a lower level realization of aspects of the Divine, and not a personal assimilation and integration of facets of this Divine.

Quietist theistic and monistic mysticisms are also considered to be lower level experiences that are properly understood as stages in the mystical ascent to the theo-monistic ideal. Mystic consolation is a powerfully affective consequence of theistic experiences, and these trance-states ought not to be pursued as ends in themselves. Moreover, various levels of monistic immersion are postulated: the ideal requires an extension of self-isolated unity through a sublation towards transcendent unity of universal Self, and a self-opening within this greater monistic identity to an awareness of the positive and personal elements arising from the depths of this monistic Source. Nevertheless, although theo-monistic mysticism espouses a theistic hierarchy, it implies no doctrinally exclusivist theology. Indeed, Chapter 5 also briefly illustrates the compatibility of forms of Buddhism and Taoism with the theo-monistic typology.

So theo-monistic mysticism proposes a framework of mysticism that has significant implications for religious pluralism. In this small book I do not delve deeply into this facet of the typology, nor do I refer to Sufism or Jewish mysticism in this context. The cogency of the thesis would no doubt be enhanced by further reference to other mystics and mystical traditions. But I put forward this theo-monistic view of mysticism as a dynamic and syncretic option in understanding mysticism. I hope it will stimulate positive and constructive dialogue.

1

Constructivist Epistemologies of Mysticism: a Critique and a Revision

I CONSTRUCTIVISM

Some philosophers of mysticism stress the dependence of mystical experience upon the conceptual categories of the mystic. This has been referred to as an intentionalist or constructivist view, where the mystic 'constructs' the framework of mystical encounter, or experiences that which was 'intended' at the outset of the mystical path. Steven Katz, for example, insists that the beliefs, values and concepts of mystics directly affect the nature of their mystical experiences. He says, 'the ontological structure(s) of each major mystical tradition is different and this pre-experiential, inherited structure directly enters into the mystical occasion itself'.[1] In contrast to essentialist theories which hold all mystical experience to be phenomenologically the same though subject to varying interpretations,[2] this constructivist view interprets the tremendous differences in mystical descriptions to be evidence of differences in experience *type*.

I will examine the essentialist view in Chapter 2. The constructivist perspective will be the focus of this chapter. It has drawn numerous responses of both support and criticism.[3] One of the more recent and provocative expositions of this constructivist epistemology is developed by John Hick. Professor Hick accepts this basic epistemological framework, adapting and refining it, as we will see, in the context of his synthesis of religion. Although he insists that mystical experiences refer to a single reality beyond themselves, he holds also that the experience is determined by the conceptual socio-religious framework which the mystics bring to

these experiences. He points to the fact that mystics obtain the pursued experiences common to their particular religious traditions. This suggests, he says,

> that mystics within the different traditions do not float free from their cultural conditioning. They are still embodied minds, rooted in their time and place. They bring their Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Muslim or Sikh sets of ideas and expectations with them on the mystical path and are guided by them towards the kind of experience that their tradition recognises and leads them to expect (p. 295).[4]

Now it seems to me that the difficulties associated with the constructivist view of mystical experience have not been fully appreciated. This chapter will focus in particular upon Hick's development of the view, clarifying problems associated with it that apply to the extreme constructivist thesis in general. These constructivist epistemologies overemphasise the role of the socio-religious categories of the mystic; hence they are not compatible with the view that a reality impacts upon the mystic in any creative and original way. It will become clear that as a consequence of this over-emphasis on pre-experiential categories, constructivism cannot adequately explain significant phenomena associated with mystical experience, namely, mystic heresy on the one hand and the similarities of mystical experience between different traditions on the other. But the problems to which the constructivist is responding, as well as those associated with the view, point towards a revision which overcomes these difficulties. This is an experiential-constructivist view which is outlined later in this chapter, one that understands mystical experience in terms of a diversity of *both* experiences and intepretations. In maintaining a creative and original impact of a reality upon the experiencing subject, this view overcomes the difficulties which extreme forms of constructivism encounter in understanding phenomena associated with mysticism.

Professor Hick's adaptation, as I mentioned, hypothesizes a reality external to the subject of the experience. He thinks the mystic encounters a divine reality; often constructivists are implicitly reductionist, usually referring to the experience in terms only of the subjective frame and concepts. For Hick the experi-

ence, like normal relational encounters, involves an impact of one reality upon another. The difference, however, is that the mystic, a person possessing an unusual sensitivity to religious phenomena (p. 166), encounters the nonempirical 'Real' rather than a person or thing. The 'Real' signifies for Hick in a religiously neutral manner the transcendent reality hypothesized by the various traditions (pp. 10–11). But it is important to note at the outset that the key feature of the experience is the authentic information conveyed from the Real to the mystic. This information transferred from the Real 'is directly prehended at some deep level of the mystic's psyche' (p. 166). In fact, Hick says the ' "presence" of the Real consists in the availability, from a transcendent source, of information that the human mind/brain is capable of transforming into what we call religious experience' (p. 244). This information presumably corresponds to Kant's idea of sense data (intuitions) which are synthesized by the categories of understanding in normal empirical knowing. This ultimate Reality transmits authentic information to the mystic, information which 'originates at the interface between the Real and the human psyche' (p. 168), and which the mystic mysteriously transforms into conscious experience (p. 244). So the model, as Hick says,

> assumes the impact of the presence of the Real upon the mystic, this impact or presence generating information that is transformed into a conscious mode which the mystic and the mystic's community can assimilate. In the transformation of information into meaningful human experience the mystic's mind employs the same constructive capacities that operate in the creation of dreams (p. 167).

Herein, then, arises Hick's constructivist perspective. The mystic must make sense of the information received in the encounter with transcendent reality. Hick sees two possibilities – two categories by which one can assimilate such an encounter. This is either *personae*, the Real as personal, active, loving, judging Being, or *impersonae*, the Real as impersonal, inactive, and qualityless Absolute. These categories of experience function in the manner of the Kantian categories, structures which allow the subject to experience noumenal reality in terms of a conceptualized phenomenon. The information in the encounter of the Real is

phenomenalized as either personal (God, Śiva, Īśvara, Allah, etc.) or impersonal (Brahman, Tao, Nirvāna, Godhead, etc.), depending upon the predominant culture-relative category and its associated concepts. In terms of information theory, then, authentic information is transmitted from the Real to the mystic in the mystical encounter, and the mystic then transforms the information into religious experience in terms of the conceptions by which the Real is known within the culture-relative categories of either *personae* or *impersonae* (p. 244). Examples of the kind of information which is given meaning by the category of *personae* are 'the goodness, love and mercy of God; the absolute claim of God upon our lives; the availablility of salvation and eternal life, and the cosmic optimism which flows from this' (p. 169). Information conveyed via the *impersonae* category might be the impermance or illusoriness of this world, or perhaps the divine immanence in the world, or the ultimate unity of self with the Real.

Now if this summary of Hick's view is accurate, we can begin to illustrate its implications by contrasting it from the Kantian epistemology to which it shows such an affinity. Like Katz, Hick views the experience as over-determined by the mystic's socio-religious categories of experience, categories which are culture-relative. Kant's categories, however, are universal and necessary. Hick insists that the nature of the experience depends upon the concepts and categories, either personal or impersonal, of the mystic's socio-religious history. He says, 'it is at this level, at which experience is pervaded, moulded and coloured by human meanings, that I wish to maintain that all experience involves concept-laden forms of interpretation' (p. 142). The experience, in this view the interpretation of the information conveyed by the Real, will depend upon the mystic's religious background. For example, quoting Robert Gimello in reference to Buddhism, Hick refers to the experiences as 'contrived exemplifications of Buddhist doctrine' (pp. 295–6). What the mystic *receives* from the experience depends upon what she or he *brings* to the experience. But then one wonders about the nature of the information which is presumably interpreted here. Should it not have some effect upon the content of the experience?

In Kant's view the noumenon has some effect upon the experiencing subject even though the categories are in constant play. For Kant there is something about the noumenon which affects its

experience as phenomenon. For instance, although we cannot know the thing in itself, we can know, using the same categories, the thing in contrast to some other similar thing. The noumenon determines whether a phenomenal object is of this size rather than that, or of a particular causal order rather than another. However, in Hick's view there is nothing in the information from the Real itself which would lead the mystic towards one religious interpretation rather than another. Like Kant who insists that we cannot know the thing in itself, Hick says 'we cannot apply to the Real *an sich* the characteristics encountered in its *personae* and *impersonae*' (p. 246). The attributes encountered in its *personae* and *impersonae* apply only to the real as phenomena: 'None of the concrete descriptions that apply within the realm of human experience can apply literally to the unexperienceable ground of that realm.' (p. 246) But from this Kantian perspective regarding the noumenal realm, Hick concludes that all personal and impersonal religious interpretations are compatible with the information conveyed by the Real. Well, what is it then that the Real manifests to the mystic? Professor Hick says it manifests information of a moral and spiritual value. It conveys religiously valuable information – information which illuminates, challenges, and encourages others (p. 168).

The transformation of authentic information into conceptual data involves either *personae* or *impersonae* categories. One can for example experience the grace, mercy and awesome power of a personal God or perhaps the emptiness or suchness of the impersonal Real or its immanence in the world. The authentic information is sufficiently plastic to allow for a variety of encounters – experiences that are determined by the subject's conceptual framework. But it cannot give to the mystic information over and above or contrary to her or his conceptual framework. Interpretational differences are dependent upon pre-experiential concepts of interpretation; authentic information cannot push a non-theistic mystic to a theistic interpretation or vice versa. So there would appear to be *nothing* in the information which would bring to the mystic new religious insight and knowledge. But surely, then, it is misleading to speak of that which is transferred from the Real to the mystic as 'information'. The nature of the information is solely dependent upon the conceptual framework which determines the experience type. Moreover, 'transferred' here would

only be appropriate if the information played some role in the interpretation of the experience. But authentic information plays no interpretational role in the experience. Indeed, its role would seem to be limited to an affective substantiation of concepts and categories.

If this information can be expressed only in terms of the conceptual framework which the mystic *brings* to the experience, then we can have only confirmation of information, certainly never the revealing of *new* information. That is to say, because the information does not itself in any way push the mystic towards either a theistic or non-theistic interpretation, at most mystical experience involves positive affirmation of the veracity of the conceptual framework which the mystic brings to the experience. Though the mystic might experience substantiation of information, she or he could not experience new information. For example, the mystic who conceptualizes the personal Real as merciful and loving but not as immanent in the natural world will experience mystically the mercy and love of God but not the divine presence in reality. The information of the conceptual ideas are confirmed in the experience – no new information obtains.

The problem is that Hick wants to hold both at the same time an extreme constructivist perspective and the position that the Real significantly impacts upon the mystic. But if the information does not affect the interpretation one way or another then we cannot speak of the Real 'impacting upon' the mystic in any creative sense, and we must begin to wonder about the intelligibility of 'authentic information'; on the other hand, if the information *does* affect the interpretation and the interpretation can take a variety of forms, then one is forced either to infer a multiplicity of realities contained in the Real or to try to explain the variety in terms of interpretational differences of experiences that are phenomenologically the same. Despite the apparent similarities between the essentialist view and Hick's constructivism, Hick explicitly rejects essentialism, insisting that although the Real is singular, mystical experiences, and not just their interpretations, are different. But in light of the rejection of essentialism, the danger in inferring some influence of the Real upon the interpretation is apparently mystic relativism. This does not bode well for Hick's attempt to unify the plurality of religious phenomena. In light of the tremendous diversity of mystical experience, if the

Real is thought to affect the interpretation of these experiences then we must infer a variety of spiritual realities rather than one common Real. But this implies, apparently, a religious relativism.

Hick rejects relativism and holds that belief in one common Real is compatible with the diversity of mystical experience since experience can be subsumed under socio-religious interpretation. For him, then, the evidence which favours mystic diversity does not count against his religious synthesis, and in fact is thought to justify the constructivist hypothesis. However, in his extreme constructivist perspective Hick inadvertantly removes from the experience the possibility of the Real affecting the mystic's consciousness in any new or creative way. Such would require that the Real play some role in the interpretation of mystical experience, a possibility which is ruled out in the over-emphasis on the mystic's pre-experiential categories.

Now in over-emphasising the significance of pre-experiential categories of the mystic, constructivism is unable to explain adequately certain religious phenomena associated with mysticism. As Donald Evans has pointed out, it is important to keep in mind that reference to the diversity of mystical descriptions merely illustrates the constructivist thesis, it does not prove it.[5] I think this point is not always appreciated, and it becomes more telling against the constructivist thesis when it is recognized that similarities in mystical descriptions between traditions, which are by no means minimal, actually count as evidence against this view, unless the scholar can satisfactorily show in relevant cases that mystics of different traditions read the same books, performed the same practices, expected the same encounters, and so on. Surely there are cases where experiences of mystics from different traditions are similarly described, yet there are no socio-religious similarities. The constructivist thesis cannot explain this phenomenon.

Moreover, it cannot adequately account for mystic heresy. Certain mystics not only flirt dangerously with heresy, their experience descriptions imply heretical beliefs. This forces us to seriously question the constructivist hypothesis because in the constructivist view the experiences of mystics should corroborate or correspond to the religious doctrine in which mystics participate. If the experience is determined solely by the socio-religious categories of the mystic then experience descriptions should not

contradict the doctrine in which the mystic is immersed. Indeed, if the experience merely confirmed the pre-experiential conceptual framework – if it did not involve new information – these mystics would have little reason to insist that they encounter realities or gain knowledge which contradict their socio-religious background. But many mystics are deeply involved in theological development or interpretation which contradicts that of their tradition, or relates to it very tenuously. How are we to understand the Sufis in Islam, Vedāntins like Rāmānuja and Aurobindo, a Lutheran like Jacob Boehme, or a Dominican like Meister Eckhart? Surely we cannot understand the mystical perspectives of *all* these relatively untraditional characters in terms *only* of their socio-religious backgrounds.[6] Given the constructivist thesis that experience is determined solely by socio-religious categories of interpretation, it seems impossible that mystics grounded in traditional theology should propose heretical or even unconventional descriptions of their experiences. Rather, it would be appear to be much more plausible that the very nature of their mystical experiences led some of these mystics to contradict doctrines which they would otherwise have naturally expressed given their interpretive background. Indeed, the phenomena of mystic heresy speak very strongly against the constructivist hypothesis.

The constructivist attempts to show the impossibility of separating mystical experience from its interpretation, an interpretation which hinges upon the subject's pre-experiential framework. We have seen that this view is not compatible with the idea that the mystic encounters a reality which conveys any new or creative information. If the mystic experiences only that which she or he brings to the experience conceptually, then no new information can obtain; if the experience has no effect upon the interpretation then at most the experience involves the confirmation of pre-experiential information. But in over-emphasising the role of the mystic's socio-religious concepts in the experience, and thereby ruling out the possibility of a reality creatively impacting upon the mystic, constructivism cannot adequately account for the common mystical elements between religious traditions and for mystic heresy.

II EXPERIENTIAL-CONSTRUCTIVISM

Where does this leave us? We are faced with a wide variety of descriptions of mystical experience, a diversity that I think speaks against the essentialist view that mystical experience is phenomonologically the same though interpreted differently. The difficulties facing the essentialist perspective will be clarified in some detail in Chapter 2. In light of the ineffectiveness of the essentialist view to which the constructivists are responding, as well as the difficulties associated with the constructivist perspective, I would suggest a middle way, so to speak, between the two extremes. We must explain mystical experience in terms of *both* variety of experiences and variety of interpretations.

Now within Hick's epistemological framework there is no way of knowing if the Real is singular. Indeed, as in Kant's perspective the issue of plurality/singularity of noumenal reality cannot be resolved by recourse to categories which apply only to the phenomenal realm.[7] Perhaps it is the case that there are a variety of realities that a mystic might encounter. This would begin to explain the tremendous differences between the religious responses to the Real. Perhaps it is also true that what the mystic experiences depends, in part, upon that to which she or he is open. In this perspective spiritual realities are thought to impact creatively upon the mystic, conveying information which the mystic interprets according to conceptual categories she or he unconsciously or consciously deems most appropriate in understanding the mysterious effects of the encounter. The view involves a moderate constructivism; though mystics do not necessarily experience that which they expect, they can only experience that which they are prepared for or that which they can assimilate. Perhaps the acquisition of spiritual knowledge is analogous to the gradual accumulation of intellectual or moral knowledge. Just as the development of one's mental and ethical capacities involves a long and arduous learning process which builds upon related conceptual ideas which are developed in part through the experiences themselves, so the mystic is involved in moral and spiritual development which leads to experiential advancement and expertise in the spiritual realm.

This idea of cumulative concept formation is expressed by Caroline Franks Davis in terms of mental models of encoding.

These models involve either a conscious application of structures to items of perception or 'incorporated' interpretations which allow for the unconscious transformation of stimuli into intelligible experience. But these concepts find their basis in terms of the interaction between structural concepts and external stimuli. As Franks Davis says, 'there is no absolute dichotomy between concepts derived from experience and concepts brought to experience, or between "experience" and "interpretation" '.[8]

In this experiential-constructivist[9] view, then, there is thought to exist a dynamic interchange between the Real and the mystic whereby the mystic is continuously involved in conceptual development and spiritual learning. Mystics cannot encode spiritual experiences which are beyond their present conceptual capabilities, and the very nature of these experiences makes them difficult to explain. Thus an experienced reality can issue in a variety of different, though not unrelated, interpretations, accounts which are ramified according to the mystic's socio-religious background. Mystics from different traditions can experience the same reality (even inadvertently), though giving an account which differs according to their socio-religious tradition.

Moreover, there is the possibility in this epistemological frame that the mystic can overcome *all* categories of interpretation and experience a trance-state of consciousness-purity. That is to say, the mystic, through certain meditative techniques, empties herself of all contents of consciousness, achieving a conditioned-less realization, free of all subject–object experiential categories. As we will see in later chapters, these are monistic realizations of the core of Self or of identity between essential Self and the Real. Although these experiences are non-relational, they nevertheless are to be understood as realizations of a Reality essential to the subject, which positively affects the mystic's consciousness in profound ways.[10]

In maintaining the positive impact of the Real upon the mystic, this experiential-constructivist perspective overcomes the problems associated with the extreme constructivist thesis. Unlike what can happen in Hick's view, the authentic information takes a dynamic and creative role in the experience. The experienced reality conveys information or data of sense intuition over and above that of the categories of interpretation, thereby providing new spiritual insight. Sometimes the spiritual noumenon is only

adequately interpreted in terms which contradict the theological beliefs of the mystic's tradition, forcing the mystic into the dangerous position of propounding and defending beliefs which the religious authorities deem unorthodox or heretical. Moreover, mystics of different traditions who encounter the same reality sometimes interpret it in strikingly similar concepts; and there are some mystics who, despite their native socio-religious categories, gain the spiritual expertise to meaningfully experience a variety of spiritual realities, encounters which they can then rank in terms of spiritual profundity, a ranking which depends to some degree upon the experienced realities themselves.[11]

This position emphasises the creative and dynamic role of mysticism in religion and implies a mystic elitism of sorts. In this view mystics are understood to be central figures in religious development, and spiritual transformation in mystical experience is considered to be the highest religious goal. Most importantly however, the view need not imply mystic relativism. If various experienced realities cannot be understood within a teleological framework of spiritual progression then we face an incommensurable diversity of mystical experiences. But a unified mystic pluralism will obtain if such an evaluative scale is evidenced and justified.

Justifying an evaluative scale in mysticism is a notorious problem, best illustrated in a single religious tradition by the quarrels between Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaitan Vedāntins over the superiority of mystic monism or theism. I will examine aspects of these disputes in Chapter 3. A cogent framework of mysticism requires that the place and significance of the various authentic mystical experiences be clarified *in terms* of the highest experience. Although theistic mysticism has been championed on social-moral grounds, such arguments have little force in light of the monistic ideal, and in any case they imply mystic relativism in so far as they leave monistic and theistic experiences unrelated. A unifying mystic pluralism requires an explanation which shows how the various experiences conform to the theistic or monistic framework; it requires a mystic teleology which accounts intelligibly for the various mystical experiences in terms of either a theistic or monistic hierarchy, and treats them as authenticate and genuine realizations.

In Chapter 3, I will show how it is possible in a theistic tele-

ological framework to account for monistic experiences in terms of the nature of theistic experiences, treating these as necessary and authentic experiences in the mystic teleology. But the reverse does not hold true in a monistic framework. In a monistic framework theistic experiences are not regarded as necesary to the monistic ideal, nor is the content of the experience reinforced or validated in the higher realizations. In the theistic view an active theistic mysticism oriented around creativity, compassion and love is considered to be religion in its highest form, though not one which degrades numinous, monistic, nature and paranormal experiences. Rather, it coherently draws these experiences into the mystic framework, explicitly showing their relationship to both the higher theistic experiences and the *very nature* of the Real. A theistic teleological perspective draws the various experiences into a cogent and coherent framework, and it justifies the hierarchy in terms of the nature of the experiences themselves. A monistic framework, on the other hand, is unable to show adequately the necessary relationship and relevance of theistic mysticism to the higher monistic; as I will argue in Chapter 3, a monistic teleology cannot justify the hierarchy in terms of the nature of the experiences themselves, in the way that a theistic teleology can.

The theistic framework I have in mind will be illustrated from Hindu and Christian mystical traditions, with reference to Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Aurobindo Ghose, Jan Van Ruusbroec, Meister Eckhart and Jacob Boehme. Roughly, the schema is as follows: experiences of nature mysticism, as well as numinous and paranormal experiences, can be found in both traditions. These experiences will be drawn coherently into the framework in Chapter 5. Those Christian experiences associated with negative theology, such as experiences of Godhead and *Ungrund*, are correlated with monistic Vedāntic experiences. Although there are thought to be various forms of theistic experiences which do not require preliminary monistic experiences, certain monistic experiences are regarded both as necessary for and subordinated to the highest theistic experiences of personal realities and ultimately a personal Real, within the framework of a spiritual teleology where the ideal is the actualization of the essential nature (creativity, compassion, love, justice, consciousness, bliss) of this personal Real. In this view the highest theistic experiences *require* for their realization

preliminary monistic experiences. That is to say, in order to experience the Real theistically in its highest forms, and actually become a unique personal and active expression of the Real, one must first undergo a very radical self-surrender and self-abandonment, one associated with monistic experiences. This hierarchical typology of mystic processes and experiences will be clarified in Chapters 2 and 3. Moreover, the Divine in this typology is understood to be both static and active, non-dual and distinctive, impersonal and personal. The hierarchy proposes a Divine dialectic wherein the monistic and theistic elements of the Real are reconciled at both a theoretical and a practical level. This is the subject of Chapter 4, and is why I call the hierarchy theo-monistic mysticism. The theo-monistic transformative processes are associated with the apophatic, static and passive monistic experiences of unity with the Real, a transformative experience which in its negative, monistic mode opens up the very possibility of communal participation in the compassion and creativity essential to the personal Real. Louis Dupré, for example, depicts this transformation in the Christian context as a process whereby the mystic 'comes to share the dynamics of God's inner life, a life not only of rest and darkness, but also of creative activity and life. . . . The contemplative accompanies God's own move from hiddenness to manifestation within the identity of God's own life'.[12] As we will see, this type of theo-monistic transformative hierarchy is illustrated in the mystic theology of Boehme, Ruusbroec, Eckhart, Rāmānuja, and Aurobindo Ghose. But I will begin the development only indirectly, in the context of a critique of essentialist epistemologies of mysticism; in drawing out the problems of the essentialist perspective in Chapter 2, I will begin to develop the theo-monistic typology in reference to Eckhart and Ruusbroec.

2

Introvertive Mystical Experiences: Monistic, Theistic, and the Theo-Monistic

I THE ESSENTIALIST THESIS

Some scholars have responded to the apparent differences between monistic and theistic mystical experiences by emphasising the role of socio-religious interpretation of the experiences. Both monistic and theistic experiences, they point out, are described as wholly unlike normal sensory events. These mystics claim to go beyond normal categories of cognition; the experiences are said to be spaceless and timeless realizations which, though not strictly ineffable, defy precise and positive description. Moreover, the mystical exercises – the spiritual training and mental preparation – seem similar for both theistic and monistic mystics. Common mystical means, along with the fact that normal categories of interpretation are not in play during the experience, suggest that mystics interpret a singular experience type according to their particular theological or philosophical background.

So, for example, Evelyn Underhill distinguishes between positive and negative mystical theologies through which, she argues, a singular experience type is translated into dialectical symbols.[1] W. T. Stace confirms this kind of view, classifying the monistic and theistic both as introvertive (inward oriented) mystical experiences that are interpreted differently.[2] Later, Ninian Smart influentially clarifies and refines this basic perspective in response to R. C. Zaehner's distinction between monistic and theistic types. Smart speaks of the differences in terms of the mystics' own 'auto'-interpretations of phenomenologically similar experiences.[3] Currently there is a surge in constructivist perspectives which

claim that the experiences are subsumed in interpretational categories; in these views there can be no common theistic and monistic experience type. I have examined and criticized this constructivist perspective in Chapter 1. However, the 'essentialist' view that monistic and theistic experiences are phenomenologically the same is still ably defended by some scholars of mysticism. For example, recently L. Philip Barnes gives a lucid account of the essentialist position in light of some of the significant figures I briefly mention, and Caroline Franks Davis argues that auto-interpretations are for the most part reflexive descriptions by mystics of experiences where there is little, if any, immediate interpretation during the experience itself.[4] This kind of support gives the essentialist thesis some plausibility.

But the essentialist thesis is most likely not true. Although I do not agree with Zaehner's general censure of monistic experiences, his monistic–theistic dichotomy seems aptly to depict different types of experiences. In this chapter I will clarify the fundamental differences between monistic and theistic introvertive experiences. I think this is very important, for the radical dichotomy between the two types of accounts seems often neglected in the essentialist pursuit for simplicity of explanation. I will then show the problems associated with the essentialist view. Not only is there no prima facie evidence to justify the thesis, some mystics espouse both possibilities of experience in a way that strongly supports the monistic-theistic dichotomy. These points can best be made in reference to W. T. Stace's work. He shows that the monistic perspective is expressed by some theistic mystics; hence, he argues, theistic mystics are ramifying monistic experiences according to their theistic socio-religious framework. But, while Stace is quite correct to point out that some theistic mystics espouse monistic accounts of experiences, this does not show that theistic experiences are monistic. To clarify my position I will focus upon the references Stace makes to Jan Van Ruusbroec and Meister Eckhart to illustrate his thesis. It will become clear that their monistic descriptions do not reflect theistic experiences; rather, these mystics clearly distinguish between, and espouse, both types of experiential possibilities. So it is not likely that they are theistically ramifying monistic experiences. Nevertheless, some of their theistic experiences are intimately related to distinctive monistic realizations, suggesting a third type of introvertive

mysticism. These are what I call theo-monistic experiences, realizations of a theistic nature that arise from transformative monistic unity. Theo-monistic experiences are certainly not exclusive to Christian mysticism, and effectively account for the personalist orientation of so many monistic mystics. Moreover, theo-monistic mysticism provides a theistic teleological hierarchy within which the various mystical experiences might be explained and integrated.

II MONISTIC VERSUS THEISTIC EXPERIENCES

The apparent differences between monistic and theistic experiences pose the greatest threat to the thesis that there exists a common core of mysticism. In examining the essentialist thesis the terms of the distinction must be fully appreciated, for they do not coalesce easily or smoothly. Indeed, they seem incommensurable. What is the basis of dichotomy? A preliminary difficulty is posed by Ninian Smart who points out that within monistic mysticism itself, experiences are highly ramified by the mystic's auto-interpretations of doctrinal beliefs. He mentions Buddhist, Sāṅkhya Yogic, and Advaitic experiences.[5] To this list we could also add some Taoist accounts. But there are key common elements of these experiences which are not plausibly ramifications of interpretation, and so there is good reason for distinguishing theistic mysticism from the monistic type.

The monistic experience is described in negative terms, over and against all that which we know in a positive sense. Most radically in this fashion it is called *śūnyatā* (emptiness) by some Buddhists, who often will not say much more about it directly. Sāṅkhya Yogins characterize it as the realization of one's *puruṣa* (Self), of which there are an infinite number. This *puruṣa* is utterly isolated from *prakṛti* (matter), where *prakṛti* constitutes everything besides these singular eternal selves. The Chuang Tzu characterizes it paradoxically as the experience of the not-something – not-nothing Tao. In *Advaita* it is identity with the One, which is unified existence, consciousness, and bliss, static and unchanging, and absolutely transcending this composite and mutable empirical realm. Clearly, these four brief descriptions do differ radically in metaphysical and anthropological assumptions and implica-

tions; but in their apophatism they all agree that the experience is not only without sensory and conceptual content but also tremendously affective, non-dual, static and impersonal. Although not powerfully descriptive, these characteristics constitute the common elements of various monistic accounts. More specifically, these accounts similarly point to a Reality different from all that we see and know; it is wholly other than this caused, temporal, spatial, changing, growing, composite and differentiated reality. In Chapter 4, I will return to these common elements in a brief Hindu–Christian comparison. But for now these common characteristics can be summarized in terms of non-dualism, staticity, impersonalism, and affective power. These essential elements correspond to Ninian Smart's depiction of the common mystical experience of 'consciousness-purity'. This non-dualistic experience is expressed in a negative, impersonal, ontological language which involves dialectical paradox, and can also act as a kind of philosophical askesis in the mystical means.[6]

Like monistic experiences, theistic experiences are also said to be immensely blissful and beyond normal sensory perception and conceptual categories. But in striking contrast to monistic accounts, theistic experiences are described in terms of devotional rapture, a union with an active and compassionate personal Being, who is or possesses the moral attributes of goodness and love to a superlative degree. In theistic mysticism some sense of self-identity remains in a powerfully affective experience which is described in strikingly personal terms. This, I think, is the basis of the contrast: monistic experiences involve a loss of duality or differentiation which rules out personal experience altogether. But theistic mysticism is personalist. Here the Real is considered Self-conscious, which means the Real has a sense of being in contrast to created entities. We can speak in this case in analogical terms of personality. Not only is this Real essentially active and dynamic, but this Real can also relate or communicate its Self-consciousness to people, though not via the sensory and conceptual modes by which we normally relate. In this context this Real is superlatively moral and expresses in mystical experience these characteristics. The Real is, in some sense which we cannot fully cognize, love, compassion and goodness, and imparts these energies to the mystic in the spiritual encounter of the vibrant experience, where some sense of differentiating self-identity is maintained by the participants.

But in the monistic account there is nothing about the Reality which would allow the mystic to distinguish it from herself or himself. We can illustrate this point in brief reference to the apophatic Advaitic notions of *saccidānanda*: the experienced Real is pure and unified existence, consciousness and bliss. But this pure consciousness could have no sense of relational Self-consciousness, for such would differentiate it from the consciousness of other beings. It is a non-reflexive awareness or awakening of primary Being, not a consciousness of distinctive Self. Moreover, the Reality is one devoid of all sense of personal reference or feeling. It is emotionless, relationless, and amoral; personal attributes require a sense of relational self-consciousness. It is, then, an inactive Being of pure consciousness which cannot relate or communicate. To speak of it as pure bliss, therefore, is to point to a bliss completely independent of other things, and one which it 'is' rather than 'possesses'. As such, it is not a proper emotional feeling, but a state of utter tranquility and serenity in identity, corresponding well to the Advaitic simile of peaceful dreamless sleep.

I will discuss this experience of *saccidānanda* in a bit more detail in Chapter 5. But for now it is important only to note that once the content of this Advaitic account is clarified, we see its similarity to the negative descriptions given by certain Buddhist, Sāṅkhya Yogic and Taoist mystics. Non-dualism, staticity, impersonalism and blissfulness are the common elements expressed by these monistic mystics. Clarified in this manner, the contrast to theistic descriptions is striking. It is hard to imagine how mystics could fail to distinguish accurately between two so radically different formulations of experience. But Stace claims that theistic mystics encounter in introvertive experience only this impersonal Real: that theistic mystics theistically misinterpret monistic experiences. As I mentioned, Stace quotes both Eckhart and Ruusbroec to illustrate his thesis. For example, in an account which refers to the theistic Christian Trinity, Ruusbroec speaks of a blissful beatitude experienced in the context of passive unity. He says:

> There follows the union *without distinction*. Enlightened men have found themselves an essential contemplation which is *above reason and beyond reason*, and a fruitive tendency which pierces through every condition and all being, and in which

> they immerse themselves in a *wayless abyss* of *fathomless* beatitude where the Trinity of the Divine Persons possess their nature in the *essential unity*. . . .
>
> The abysmal waylessness of God is so dark and so unconditioned that it swallows up within itself every Divine way and activity, and all the atributes of the Persons within the rich compass of the essential unity. . . .[7]

Stace goes on to parallel correctly Ruusbroec's descriptions with similarities in monistic passages from the *Upaniṣads*. Despite the references to the Trinity of Divine Persons, the theist Ruusbroec is clearly describing an introvertive monistic experience. The experience is depicted apophatically, as beyond both normal conceptual categories and the personal Trinity, where the Real is without activity and attributes. Ruusbroec speaks of a distinctionless and unconditioned unity beyond differentiated being, where activity has ceased in a blissful union of self-less identity.

Stace goes on to note Eckhart speaking similarly of a movement towards identity with the One: 'God leads the human spirit into the desert, into his own unity which is pure One.' Eckhart comments further, referring to this unity of God as the Godhead: 'In this barren Godhead *activity has ceased* and therefore the soul will be most perfect when it is thrown into *the desert* of the Godhead, where both activity and *forms are no more*, so that it is sunk and lost in this desert where its identity is destroyed.'[8] Eckhart is here not describing an encounter with a personal active God. Rather, it is an awareness of identity with something beyond God, a formless and non-active experience within which the mystic's self-identity dissolves – a realization that seems utterly monistic. Obviously Eckhart, like Ruusbroec, is espousing a monistic experience. Stace is correct in his appraisal. To those who suspect that he might have focussed only on rare exceptions in Eckhart and Ruusbroec, there are many other fine monistic illustrations in their writings. To note a more controversial example, one which Stace does not quote, Eckhart speaks of being 'transported into God's naked being', where the mystic becomes 'one with him and *one* substance and *one* essence and *one* nature and in this way a child of God'.[9]

Admittedly, this reference has an apparent theistic element not found in the other quotations. Eckhart speaks of becoming a 'child

of God', thus connoting personality and relationship. This is an important point, key indeed, to understanding mystical transformation. But I think it supports an hypothesis quite at odds to Stace's. Eckhart here is expressing a relationship which arises out of the monistic experience, not one that occurs in the experience itself, hence giving metaphorical expression to the affective power of the experience. He is not theistically ramifying the monistic experience, but speaking of an experience closely related to this monistic immersion. I will return to this important issue later in the chapter. For now we can point out that even this reference to becoming a child of God is overshadowed by the fact that there is no reference to an active, loving and good God, but rather an utter loss of personality in identity of substance, essence and nature with the fundamental being of the Real.

These introvertive descriptions given by theistic mystics, claims Stace, indicate that theists interpret monistic experiences according to their theistic theology. Stace moves from these monistic descriptions given by theistic mystics to the hypothesis that all Christian mystics who describe their experiences theistically are involved in monistic introvertive experiences. We will limit the focus on this issue as it pertains to Eckhart and Ruusbroec. For Stace's thesis to have some plausibility it requires that Ruusbroec's and Eckhart's monistic descriptions have some strong theistic comments intermixed with or overlaying an essentially monistic account. Then we could plausibly deduce theistic interpretations of monistic experiences. But in the quotations cited the only comment remotely theistic is Eckhart's reference to becoming a 'child of God', which, I put forth, is a statement about the transformative consequence of a monistic experience. And clearly in the other examples given, Eckhart and Ruusbroec are not describing monistic experiences theistically at all. They are in fact giving purely monistic accounts of their introvertive experiences. Ruusbroec is not speaking of one or another Person of the Christian Trinity, but expressing an impersonal experience of these Persons in passive and formless Unity. Similarly, Eckhart is not speaking of a personal creative God but pointing towards the static and impersonal essence of this God, to the unity of Godhead. Indeed, their very theological language reflects the monistic-theistic distinction.

This is very important. Although both Ruusbroec and Eckhart often express themselves in Trinitarian theistic theology, they are

making claims about their experiences which contradict the essentialist thesis. Ruusbroec speaks of a state that goes well beyond personalist theology. He says 'there the three Persons give place to essential unity and abide without distinction. . . . For that beatific state . . . is so onefold that neither Father, nor Son, nor Holy Ghost is distinct according to Persons.'[10] This is not an intimate encounter in devotional love with a personal being. It is a union of identity that somehow goes deeper and further than the personal God. Ruusbroec is making a distinction between the personal God of the Trinity and the impersonal Unity beyond. Eckhart is even more adamant and explicit in this regard, incorporating the notion of Godhead to represent the Divine Essence of the personal God of the Trinity. In a sermon that Stace obviously never encountered, Eckhart distinguishes in no uncertain terms between God and the Godhead:

> Now pay attention! All creatures set their course on their highest perfection. Please now perceive what I am about to say, which I swear by my soul is the everlasting truth: I shall repeat what I have never said before: God and his Godhead are as different as heaven and earth. I will go still further: The inner and the outer person are as different as heaven and earth. But God's distance from the Godhead is many thousand miles greater still. God becomes and ceases to become, God waxes and wanes.[11]

In vivid rhetoric Eckhart passionately attempts to convey the radical difference between a personal, active and creative God and its static essence. He says, 'God becomes and ceases to become, God waxes and wanes.' Godhead is beyond personalist conceptions, indeed beyond categories and conceptions of all kinds. Godhead is only described apophatically and paradoxically, as the unified and inactive Source of personal God and all things. Eckhart says

> Everything within the Godhead is unity, and we cannot speak about it. God accomplishes, but the Godhead does not do so and there is no deed within the Godhead. The Godhead never goes searching for a deed. God and Godhead are distinguished through deeds and a lack of deeds. . . . When I come into the

> core, the soil, the stream, and the source of the Godhead, no one asks where I am coming from or where I've been. No one has missed me in the place where 'God' ceases to become.[12]

Godhead is deedless, passive Source. It does nothing, indeed Eckhart likes to refer to it as Nothing, yet it is the source of everything. This ineffable impersonal Godhead is depicted as somehow above, beyond or behind the describable personal Being. So Stace's thesis, indeed, all essentialist accounts, rest on very shaky ground indeed. He cannot justify the essentialist perspective with reference to monistic descriptions of apparently monistic experiences; and both Ruusbroec's and Eckhart's accounts appear to be just that.[13]

The case against the essentialist thesis is further strengthened by the facts that there are theistic passages of these mystics which are unobscured by monistic references, and we do not find inconsistencies in their impersonalist-personalist experiential dichotomy. In their writings there are purely theistic descriptions depicting dynamic experiences of a personal Deity. In light of their monistic descriptions, these theistic interpretations cannot plausibly be construed as theistic accounts of monistic experiences. Ruusbroec speaks, for example, of a profound mystical consolation which arises in the context of loving union with Christ:

> Out of this sweetness comes a richness of the heart and of all the bodily powers, so that it seems to man that he be caught up from within by a Divine embrace in love. This richness and this consolation are greater and more satisfying in the soul and in the body than could be all the riches that the earth might yield, even if one man could possess them all. In this richness God through His gifts sinks Himself in the heart of man, with so much consolation savouring well and so much joy that the heart from within overflows.[14]

This personalist account of the consolation of the mystical 'embrace in love', which occurs as a wonderfully consoling Real settles into the joyous heart of the mystic lover, cannot plausibly be explained as a theistic ramification of passive monistic unity. Moreover, although the details of Ruusbroec's mystical ascent are not very clearly systematized, he does insist in *The Spiritual*

Espousals on a rough distinction between theistic and monistic levels. The first stage consists of preliminary and lower level theistic devotional experiences, the second involves the further purification of the soul and mediated higher level theistic experiences, and the third consists of unmediated realizations of monistic unity.[15]

Eckhart similarly describes a theistic experience highlighted by what he calls graced or spiritual love:

> If I turn my reason – which is, after all, a light – away from all created things and focus it on God, then my reason, into which God uninterruptedly pours his grace, is enlightened and united with this divinely given love and thereby knows and loves God as he is in himself. Thus we are taught how God is poured out in creatures gifted with reason and how we with our reason draw close to his graced light and ascend to that light which is God.[16]

In contrast to the impersonalist identity with passive Godhead, Eckhart here speaks of an introvertive knowing and loving of a grace-giving God. In this passage Eckhart is speaking of a theistic experience unrelated to monistic Godhead. As we will see in a moment, this is not always the case. But in another theistic passage he says: 'Grace comes with the Holy Spirit. It carries the Holy Spirit on its back. Grace is not a stationary thing; it is always found in a becoming. It can flow out of God and then only immediately. The function of grace is to transform and reconvey the soul to God. Grace makes the soul God-like.'[17] Here, in stark contrast to monistic sublation, we have another theistic account, one that involves an active and mediating energy that draws the soul towards relationship with the Real.

Given Eckhart's previous comments about the Godhead, and his distinction between Godhead and God, these passages defy a monistic interpretation. There are no references to Godhead experience here. The static unified Godhead does not love, and remains non-dualistically graceless. Eckhart insists on these points. If he did not then the essentialist thesis might have some plausibility; only if the monistic Real were given some positive personalist attributes, could Stace's position have some force. But it is implausible to suppose that Eckhart and Ruusbroec in their the-

istic interpretations are misinterpreting monistic experiences when they themselves are quite explicit and consistent about the two radically different types.[18] Stace is mistaken to think that the introvertive experience is of a singularly monistic type; introvertive experiences involve both the impersonal monistic unity and the personal theistic union.

III THEO-MONISTIC EXPERIENCES

There is also a third type of introvertive experience, one which we might call a post-monistic realization or theo-monistic transformation. I suspect it is this transformative account which has led many essentialist scholars to suppose a common type, for it draws the monistic and theistic experiences together in the expression of this non-dual, inactive and impersonal realization through a personal socio-moral orientation involving certain theistic elements. In the theistic accounts of Ruusbroec and Eckhart quoted above, they are giving us theistic descriptions which appear to be wholly unrelated to monistic realizations. But many of their theistic accounts, although phenomenologically distinct, are associated with monistic realizations. What they propose is an experience which is not properly monistic or theistic as we have traditionally understood these mystical experiences.

Eckhart's reference to 'becoming a child of God' through an experience of monistic unity, which I mentioned above, is one example. Speaking of Godhead as Father of the Trinity, he begins to clarify the transformative process involved in theo-monistic experience. There is in the human being a fundamental desire to realize the integrating source essential to the personal Real. The apex of the human soul 'wants something better than God having a name. . . . it wants him as he is Father. . . . It wants him as he is the marrow out of which goodness springs; it wants him as he is the nucleus from which goodness flows; it wants him as he is the root, the vein, from which goodness exudes. Only there is he Father'.[19] This is a monistic encounter beyond personalist and dualistic conceptions, beyond even the grace-mediation of the personal Real. Through Godhead experience the 'soul is united with God and embraced by God, and grace escapes the soul so that it can now no longer accomplish things with grace but

divinely in God. Thus the soul is in a wonderful way enchanted and loses itself.'[20] Speaking of this as the contemplation of God unveiled, Eckhart says: 'In this experience the soul receives all her being and all her life, and draws all that she is from the ground of God, and knows nothing of knowledge, or of love, or of anything at all. She becomes entirely and absolutely passive in the being of God.'[21] But static monistic isolation is not the religious ideal. Eckhart asks, 'What help is it to me that Mary is full of grace, if I am not also full of grace?', thus emphasising the ideal that the mystic becomes grace-filled and grace-giving, over and above the consolation of theistic encounters. He goes on immediately to ask further, 'And what help is it to me that the Father gives birth to his Son unless I too give birth to him? It is for this reason that God gives birth to his Son in a perfect soul and lies in the maternity bed so that he can give birth to him again in all his works.'[22]

Eckhart proposes a transformative experience wherein monistic identification with the impersonal essence of a personal Real naturally leads the mystic to mirror the moral activity of a creative deity. He expresses this process vividly in Trinitarian terms, as the Father giving birth to the Son. This immediately entails the Holy Spirit or Love, as well as passionate creative activity and relationship; this birthing in the Divine finds its expression in the social world.[23] I would suggest that this theo-monistic experience helps us to understand the monistic accounts given by certain Taoist, Buddhist and Hindu personalist mystics. Clearly we must recognize various degrees of realization of Source-consciousness, as well as the very many forms this consciousness can take in its human actualization. But the phenomenological structure of the transformation involves a monistic identity with an inactive and impersonal Source from which emanates elements essential to a creative and personal Divine. The mystic encounters her or his source in the Divine in an experience which is literally identification with that potential energy through which arises their essential being as persons. The Source is experienced as static and amoral consciousness-purity, to use a phrase of Stace and Smart; it is empty of personalist–dualistic forces. That is the most we can say about it – more even than some personalist monists would want to say – which is not much at all. It is mysteriously apophatic. It is a pre-birth state, so to speak, described provocatively by mystics who speak of it as a kind of

profound womb-experience. It somehow precedes differentiation and personalism: it is the source of personal God, people, and creativity.

Creativity is an utterly mysterious phenomenon; both the Chuang Tzu and Eckhart claim that it is out of this monistic Source that genuine creativity arises. Eckhart insists that in order to transform herself in Divinity, the mystic must realize this Source of her being. He says, the 'beginning is for the sake of the final goal, for in that final end everything rests which ever received existence endowed with reason. The final goal of being is the darkness or the unknowability of the hidden divinity, which is that light that shines "but the darkness has not comprehended it".'[24] Similarly, Ruusbroec espouses a monistic ideal: 'Now all holiness and all blessedness is dependent on the soul being led, through its likeness to God and through the means of grace and glory, to rest in the essential unity.'[25] Yet for both mystics the spiritual transformation does not stop in monistic unity. For out of this monistic Source issues dynamic, creative and personal elements; and the mystic becomes a medium of this emanation. Ruusbroec says:

> For those who are most single are those most steadfast and best at peace with themselves, and they are the most deeply sunk in God, and they are the most enlightened in understanding, and the most prolific in good works, and the most common in their outflowing. . . . And therefore we must in our depths remain single, and observe all things with an enlightened reason, and with a common love transfuse all things.'[26]

So Ruusbroec, like Eckhart, proposes two types of theistic experiences, pre-monistic and post-monistic. The post-monistic is theo-monism. It can be distinguished from pre-monistic theism in that it is much more than a transient experience, and much more than mystic consolation. Mystics move beyond the interpretive mediums that are necessary in experiencing and expressing the energies and consciousness of pre-monistic theistic encounters, and they themselves become the very mediums of this Real's self-expression. Mystic self-identity is spiritually transfigured in theo-monism, as the essence of human personality is integrated into that of the Real. The Divine then becomes the internalized orient-

ing focus of the mystic's dispositions and perceptions. This is a profound advance from the mediated encounters characteristic of pre-monistic theistic mysticism. Eckhart uses a wonderful simile of a drop of water falling to the sea; the drop changes into the sea, not the sea into the drop of water. Analogously, Eckhart claims, 'When God draws the soul to himself, then the soul becomes divine, but not that God becomes the soul. Then the soul loses its name and its power but not its will and not its being.'[27] This divine integration then leads to the natural expression of the active personal elements which issue from the monistic source, in the context of the mystic's unique interpretational frame and dispositions. Eckhart says: "Happy is the person who has come to that same source out of which the Son draws. It is there that even we will receive our happiness and there where his happiness lies, wherein he has his being; in this same ground all of God's friends will *receive* their blessedness and *create* from it'.[28]

IV THEO-MONISM AND MYSTIC PLURALISM

Despite significant theological or philosophical differences, all well advanced mystics are quite clear about the difficult and profound transformative processes involved in mystic transformation. The monistic experience is beyond all concepts and categories; it is a painful stripping away of egoism and all sensible interference, all that by which we connote, describe and define. But personalist monistic mystics do not remain permanently in this monistic immersion; Eckhart suggests that they are transformatively reborn into the Divine-personalist state for which they are intended. Mystics do not just identify with their monistic Source, at least not in this life; they are also temporal and spatial personal beings. Indeed, I would suggest that this combination of Source and personality has had a profound impact on our civilizations. For this rebirth out of the Source issues forth in tremendous creativity, an enlightened perspective which reflects the differentiated, dynamic, and personalist elements of theistic experiences. This conception of theo-monistic experience helps us to understand the natural creativity of the 'daemonic' Taoist Sage, the compassion of the *bodhisattva*, the benevolence of the *jīvanmukta*, and the deified activity of the Sufi. In Chapter 5, I will briefly

examine the Taoist and the Buddhist examples of theo-monism; throughout the rest of the book I will be referring to some Hindu illustrations. Theo-monistic mystics do that which arises from the Source; they create, but not impersonally and amorally. Rather they do that which all truly religious personal beings respect and aspire to do; they express to their fellow human beings, who also originate from the Source, those realized personalist attributes of the Divine that issue out of the Source.

The Chuang Tzu speaks of becoming the 'daemonic Sage'. Eckhart speaks similarly of becoming a 'child of God'. To become a child of God one must realize the Source of the child and of God – what various monistic mystics call the Godhead, the Father or Unity of the Trinity, *nirguṇa* Brahman, *śūnyatā*, or the Tao. These are monistic experiences, but they have profound theistic consequences. In the context of Ruusbroec and Eckhart, and for all other personalist monistic mystics, I call it a theo-monistic experience because although it involves an impersonal monistic realization, it issues in a perspective that also reflects an active, creative and personal Real. It involves the expression of the powers of this Real through dynamic personalist creativity. Ruusbroec says 'This exalted unity of the Divine nature is a living, fertile unity,'[29] thus expressing the creative impetus of monistic mystics. Eckhart also stresses the monistic mystics' intimate connection with a supreme spiritual Being. He emphasises theistic experiences that arise from the monistic identification – an active personalist orientation that issues from the transformative immersion in the Source. He says in 'the supreme emptiness of detachment, man and God are united in fertility; one sole determination joins them together; that of giving birth.'[30] In this regard Eckhart accentuates, like many Buddhist monists, compassion. He says: 'The highest work of God is compassion and this means that God sets the soul in the highest and purest place which it can occupy: in space, in the sea, in a fathomless ocean; and there God works compassion.'[31]

For Eckhart, like so many other monistic mystics, this monistic transformation is personalist in nature. But Eckhart goes further than some monists, insisting that we arise out of the source of a personal God; Eckhart espouses a dual nature of the Real – that there are both personal and impersonal elements of the Divine. He is not alone in this claim; the view is confirmed not only by

some other Christian mystics, but also some Vedāntins. Besides illustrating features of the theo-monistic transformation, Rāmānuja and Aurobindo Ghose, for example, also ascribe both impersonal and personal elements to the Divine. In Chapter 4, I will outline the terms of this divine dialectic and reconciliation. And in terms of contemporary Hindu-Christian dialogue, we find parallels in the thinking of Henri Le Saux, Bede Griffiths, Wayne Teasdale, and Michael von Brück.[32] In Chapter 5, I will briefly illustrate Henri Le Saux's contemporary Hindu-Christian synthesis.

The very structure of theo-monistic transformation supports this view of an impersonal and personal Divine. For the monist moves from a passivity to a dynamism, from a non-dualistic realization of an amoral nature to a rediscovery of transmuted Self which uniquely expresses through the individual mystic-channel the active, creative, moral and personal energies which issue from this Source. Although we find the process expressed in various ways in the different mystical traditions, it can be explained in neutral phenomenological terms. It seems aptly described as the monistic movement to personalist mysticism; more specifically it is the mystic identification with that Source of potential energy through which arises their essential being as persons. Donald Evans describes it as a kind of transparent mysticism; the mystic moves beyond active social orientations and personality, wholly emptying herself of consciousness. Through common mystical means of purification, monistic mystics render the self transparent to this apophatic Source.[33] Louis Dupré speaks similarly in psychological terms of a connatural knowing – an intellectual intuition of essential self or substance within this unfathomable Source – where the mind is functioning 'in the different mode of being-with reality, rather than of reflecting upon it.'[34]

Personalist monists do not remain passively within this isolated mode of being with the Source. Their introvertive contemplation is redirected in an emanative giving of creative expression. Evans refers to this process as subsequent translucent mysticism. Here the monistic mystic transmits those energies arising from the monistic Source of self, in the context of the conceptual framework she had previously abandoned in monistic transparency. The monistic mystic becomes a translucent medium of personalist and dynamic forces emanating from the experience – not an agent of passive and impersonal monism. She or he

expresses elements quite foreign to the actual state of monistic immersion; indeed, the mystic expresses elements only associated with a theistic Divine. The monist becomes an active personal and moral medium of that which arises from this Source.

Theo-monistic experiences thus help us to understand the personalist orientation of so many significant monistic mystics. No doubt, like theistic and monistic accounts, theo-monistic experiences can become highly ramified by the mystic's own theological and metaphysical socio-religious background, as the monist attempts to explain and justify her personalist orientation in light of her or his conceptions of this Source. Indeed, if a personalist monist is inhibited by a solely impersonal metaphysical ideal, their experiential accounts can involve confusions and incongruities in light of espoused doctrine. But once we bracket out the ramifications of various personal monistic and theistic mystics we can find a common account of transformative processes which supports three different types of experiences: the personalist theistic, the impersonalist monistic, and the theo-monistic. Theo-monism draws theistic and monistic experiences coherently together in an account of a spiritual transformation which explains and justifies both types, and it explicitly shows the coherence of related transformative experiences conveyed through different symbolic interpretations.

There are unresolved issues surrounding this typology of introvertive mysticism, perhaps the most significant being the status of other mystical experiences, and that of the impersonal monist. In Chapter 5, I will show how a theo-monistic hierarchy of experiences can incorporate paranormal, numinous and extrovertive or nature experiences into its framework, explaining and justifying the realizations in terms of the nature of the theo-monistic ideal. In regard to the impersonal monist who remains passively isolated in monistic repose, I will also illustrate in Chapter 5 the various levels and depths of monistic immersion within which the mystic can reach and to which she must be open. These will include: a solipsistic isolation or Self-absorption associated, for example, with the Quietists in Christian mysticism and Sāṅkhya Yoga in Hindu mysticism; the sublation of the Self into the unified One, as we find in Advaita Vedānta and Neo-Platonism; and various degrees of theo-monistic realizations, where the monistic mystic gradually realizes elements that can only be associated

with a creative and personal Real, and comes to share in and express these personalistic insights and energies of the creative Real that issue from the monistic Source with which she has identified.

A theo-monistic interpretation of the processes and experiences of mysticism does indeed propose a theistic hierarchy in the sense that it assumes that there is a creative Source which consists of both impersonal and personal elements, and that this Source is closely connected as Creator to this world and human beings. This of course is a phenomenological explanation which does not correspond to some doctrines espoused by certain monistic mystics concerning the nature of the Real and this realm of existence. Nevertheless, this interpretation of mystical experiences does not derive from nor rest upon the interpretative framework of any particular tradition, despite the fact that I have focussed in this chapter upon Eckhart and Ruusbroec in drawing it out. Indeed, it is open to a very wide variety of theological and spiritual symbolism; this will become clearer as we proceed. Also, it explains the active and moral orientations of so many monistic mystics, a creative and personalist focus which is such an anomaly in traditions that conceive only of a monistic Real, and espouse a non-dual, static and impersonal monistic experience as the spiritual ideal. And finally, it will become evident that theistic experiences are not granted a necessary place in a monistic hierarchy, nor given an authenticity in terms of the conceptions of a monistic Real and the monistic experiences. This is the subject of Chapter 3.

3

Monistic and Theistic Hierarchies of Mysticism

I EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS

In this chapter I will compare a monistic and a theistic hierarchical typology. As developed in Chapter 1, there are two fundamental assumptions of the experiential-constructivist epistemology of mysticism: that there exist a variety of spiritual realities that a mystic might directly experience, and the conceptual categories by which she or he encounters and interprets these spiritual realities depends, in part at least, upon the realities themselves. The mystic is involved in spiritual advancement and learning which occurs in the experiential interaction between the mystic and genuine spiritual realities.

These postulates account intelligibly for the diversity of mystical experiences, insisting that the differences between certain types are too extreme to be explained in terms of an essentialist typology – as solely a consequence of interpretational ramifications. This is especially true in regard to monistic and theistic types, which became evident in Chapter 2, and will be clarified even further in this chapter. Experiential-constructivism supposes there to be a creative and meaningful impact of the Real upon the mystic, thereby explaining both the similarities between mystics from different traditions, as well as mystic heresy. In some cases mystics encounter spiritual realities which are only properly explained in terms other than her or his socio-religious framework; in some instances, moreover, these mystics show striking parallels to experiential accounts given by mystics in different traditions, even when there exist no clear common socio-religious similarities. So experiential-constructivism also overcomes difficulties facing those extreme constuctivist perspectives that attempt to subsume completely experience under socio-religious interpretation: it can explain intelligibly similar mystic accounts

between different religious traditions as well as the phenomena of mystic heresy.

But if we assume that experiential-constructivism is true – that there are a variety of spiritual realities which can creatively and meaningfully affect the mystic – this raises the problem that mysticism, and religion, might reduce to relativism. That is to ask, how are we to understand the relative status of these various experiences? The issue is compounded in an experiential-constructivist epistemology, for we are granting an authenticity to various experiences, one which assumes a correspondence between spiritual realities and the experience type. The problem is best exemplified in the disagreements between some mystic traditions over the legitimacy, merits and superiority of theistic and monistic realizations. How are we to synthesize these experiences without thereby denying the authenticity of one or the other type? In Chapter 2, I began to illustrate how the Christian theo-monistic perspectives of Eckhart and Ruusbroec maintain monistic realizations as authentic and necessary experiences in a transformative theistic framework. In this chapter, I will continue to focus my examination on theistic and monistic types, but concentrate upon a Hindu–Christian comparison.

If we are to develop a coherent typology of mysticism which grants an authenticity to the different experiences found in the various mystic traditions of the world religions, it is important that the various experiences be understood in relation to each other and in terms of the nature of the experienced Real. In coherently drawing the experiences together this typology gives us a conceptual cogency that otherwise would not obtain. It allows us to intelligibly relate what prima facie appear to be similar types of experiences – what we commonly label 'mystical' – in terms of the very nature of the experiences. This ensures that the various experiences, considered genuine from the perspective of the particular mystic tradition, are not arbitrarily deemed inauthentic by the mystic or non-mystic outsider looking in. It also allows for a mystic pluralism which does not dogmatically prop up a particular religious theology or philosophy; it will give us a pluralism which depends upon authentic experiences found in the major religious traditions, rather than one which understands the religious perspective of others subordinately, only in terms of their own dogmatic theology and philosophy. I will begin by illustrat-

ing how an Advaitic monistic framework fails to authenticate theistic mysticism in terms of a monistic ideal. It does not establish a necessary relationship between theistic and monistic experiences, nor does it grant a significance to the content of theistic mysticism in terms of the monistic ideal. I will then illustrate how Rāmānuja's theistic hierarchy does not succumb to the same problems, but can be understood to draw monistic experiences into the framework in terms of experiential processes necessary to the theistic ideal. Finally, I will compare this Hindu perspective with Ruusbroec's Christian development, illustrating the possibility of a mystic pluralism grounded in a theo-monistic framework of experiences.

II MONISTIC HIERARCHIES

The radical difference between theistic and monistic experiences in a monistic hierarchy can be illustrated in reference to Śaṅkara, the most famous Hindu monist, and later Advaita Vedāntin commentators on his view. The goal of Advaita is to cease to identify the true Self with that which it is not. At the most personal level, this mistaken identification is associated with egoism, the focal point of our mistaken sense of self-hood or *jīva* (embodied soul), but this extends outwards to include all of this composite and mutable reality that we normally regard as real. This is not to say that the existential problem hinges upon the ego; rather it is explained as arising in *avidyā* or ignorance. The true nature of reality is a static monism, not a dynamic multiplicity, but this truth is obscured in *avidyā*, which, as A. J. Alston explains, reduces the person 'to the level of an acting suffering individual, and paints before him a world of multiplicity and illusion, an abode of change, limitation and suffering'.[1] Śaṅkara says, 'The world [universe] is qualification, like a beautiful ornament, which is superimposed [upon *Ātman*] through nescience. . . . Everything comes from nescience. This world is unreal, for it is seen by one who has nescience. . . .'[2]

The ideas of individual selfhood and a composite and mutable world, then, are illusory. Later Advaitins tended to identify *avidyā* with *māyā*, which is often translated as illusion.[3] From the perspective of normal consciousness, the self and the phenomenal

world are *māyā*. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, however, insists that we qualify this notion of *māyā*. He says 'Śaṅkara regards the world as *māyā* which is wrongly translated as illusion. The world is unreal when viewed apart from its basis in the ultimate reality of Brahman.'[4] The world and the *jīva* are only illusory in so far as an ignorant individual regards these as distinct from Brahman. Indeed, Radhakrishnan refers to the creation as 'the expression of the urge of Brahman to become many'[5], and T. R. V. Murti suggests that the 'phenomenalization of the Absolute is a free act of grace',[6] thus closely connecting Brahman to this realm of illusion. But it seems to me that these references to creation in personal terms only underscore the difficulties in explaining and justifying theistic experiences through the higher monistic. In clarifying the phenomenological elements of theistic and monistic experiences in Chapter 2, it became clear that to speak of an 'urge' to create or an element of grace, is to imply a theistic or theo-monistic Divine rather than a monistic. Moreover, we should point out in response to Radhakrishnan's qualification concerning the illusoriness of the world, that though this illusion has its basis in Brahman, it will vanish upon realization of one's true Self. Although the world is connected somehow with Brahman, its nature and status as we know it in nescience will disappear when we realize *mokṣa* (release, liberation). Swami Nikhilananda summarizes this Advaitic perspective:

> Thus māyā has been described by Vedāntists as the inexplicable Power of the Supreme Lord Parameśaśakti, by which is produced the illusion of creation, preservation, and dissolution of the universe. But from the standpoint of Brahman, which is all Light and Knowledge, there is no māyā. One identified with Brahman does not see even a trace of māyā. From the relative standpoint the true nature of Brahman seems to be obscured by an inscrutable power, which lies within Itself and brings into existence the panorama of the phenomenal universe. This is produced the illusion of ego and non-ego and their mutual relationship.[7]

Advaitin commentators have also attempted to explain *māyā* as neither real nor unreal, as possessing a status in between that of

existence and non-existence.[8] This corresponds to the depiction of the apophatic Real given by some theo-monistic thinkers, as we will see in Chapter 5. But I should point out that this status of *māyā* is most intelligibly understood in its association with a cosmic nescience (*avidyā*) within which we mistakenly regard this realm as real. According to Śaṅkara, 'Nescience causes faults (passion and aversion); they cause the activities of speech, mind, and body; and from these activities are accumulated *karmans* of which [in turn] the results are desirable, undesirable, and mixed.'[9] At our level this illusion is very real indeed, possessing a practical ontology which becomes apparent in reference to the liberating means of Śaṅkara's system. For *māyā* is the preliminary means available in the human struggle for release from the illusion. Paradoxically, *māyā* is a very mode of release from *māyā*: 'Just as a dream is true until awakening, so would the identity of the body with *Ātman* be [true, as well as] the authoritativeness of sense-perception and other [means of knowledge] and the waking state until [the attainment of] knowledge of *Ātman*.'[10]

Before discussing this importance of *māyā* as a vehicle of release from itself, I should clarify the idea of liberation in Advaita. Nikhilananda refers to it in terms of *nirvikalpaka samādhi*, the absorption of the senses, mind and ego in Brahman. He says that it is 'absorption bereft of I-consciousness, the mind totally merges in Brahman, becomes one with It and loses all distinction of knower, knowledge, and object of knowledge.'[11] But this absorption only occurs in the context of Self-realization. One's true Self (*ātman*) realizes Itself as eternal and universal Self (Brahman), thereby completely dissociating Itself from all that is other than this eternal Self. In realization of ultimate truth, one's Self is assimilated in the universal Self. Nikhilananda quotes Śaṅkara on the nature of monistic experience: 'The illumined person realizes within himself, through samādhi, the infinite and indescribable Brahman, which is of the nature of Eternal Knowledge and Absolute Bliss, which transcends all limitations and is ever free and actionless – which is like the limitless sky, indivisible and absolute.'[12]

The radical nature of this experience cannot be overemphasised. This realization of passive Unity is wholly other than this dynamic, composite and mutable realm of *māyā*. This point is accentuated in Śaṅkara's insistence that the experience is not

something to be gained. The realization of Self and all things as pure and passive unified *saccidānanda* (existence, consciousness, bliss) is not something which the mind or ego achieves. Śaṅkara says: 'Nor, again, can it be said there is a dependence of action in consequence of (Brahman or release) something which is to be obtained; for as Brahman constitutes a person's Self it is not something to be attained by that person.'[13] Indeed, it is the ego and mind, in so far as these are enmeshed in *avidyā*, that inhibit monistic realizations. They hide the truth, so to speak, from the eternal Self. As Murti comments: 'The world is not a modification of Brahman but an unreal appearance that is mistaken for it. . . . We know Brahman *only* as we negate the appearance which covers the real from our view.'[14]

The point is to remove the conditions which inhibit Self-realization. By what means might this truth shine forth? Ultimately, it is study or meditation of the truth about supreme Reality, led by a teacher, as it is revealed in the Vedas. The goal is the removal of nescience – not the illumination of an object external to a knower. Hence, as Alston points out, the function of such meditation on the Vedas 'is to negate that which impedes the self-manifestation of the Self in its true form as infinite consciousness'.[15] Śaṅkara says this is realized through meditation on the Vedas: 'The Self is to be heard, to be considered, to be reflected upon; that consideration and reflection have to follow the mere hearing.'[16] It is only via such meditation on the *mahāvākyas* (great sentences), that one can realize one's true Self, *tat tvam asi* ('That Thou art'), as Absolute Reality.

The role of the Vedas in this Self-realization is essential. Śaṅkara considers the Vedas to precede creation and to be 'eternal and the source of knowledge'.[17] They are foremost in one's spiritual progression, for they are considered to be the form of *māyā* most closely related to ultimate Reality. Nikhilananda describes their fundamental religious significance. He says, 'the Vedas, containing truths regarding the soul, the universe, and Ultimate Reality, are eternal (nitya), without beginning (anādi), and not ascribable to human authorship (apaurusheya). They are co-existent with the Creator and they form the very basis of creation.'[18] The Vedas express the truths about the nature of Self and *māyā*; they are the prime vehicles of valid philosophical speculation and spiritual realization, providing both the theoretical foundation for the cor-

rect conceptualization of the nature of this realm, as well as the prescriptive formulations for the release therefrom. The Vedas co-exist with the creator of this dynamic, mutable and differentiated realm. *Saguṇa* Brahman is the personal God of this lower realm of ignorance, the creative Brahman with qualities, who through the mysterious power of *māyā*, creates, maintains and destroys this world in an infinitely continuous cycle of *līla* (cosmic play). Higher Brahman is *nirguṇa* or qualityless, free from name and form, though one can point positively to its nature in describing it as pure and unified existence or truth (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*), and bliss (*ānanda*). The Vedas are the positive vehicle to the realization of this negative *nirguṇa* Brahman: 'As [the Vedas are devoted to one object [only], i.e., the knowledge [of Brahman], [the wise] know that they [consist of] one sentence [only]. The oneness of *Ātman* [and Brahman] should indeed be known through the understanding of the meaning of [this one] sentence.'[19] Harold Coward suggests that the *māhāvakyas* of the Vedas possess a negative function whereby their 'literal meaning of difference' is negated; this can pole vault one 'out of ordinary experience of language and the world (*māyā* or *saguṇa* Brahman) into the direct experience of *nirguṇa*, or higher Brahman.'[20]

What does theistic mysticism have to do with these conceptions of *mokṣa* and *nirguṇa* Brahman? How does devotional mysticism fit into this monistic hierarchy? Śaṅkara says 'The mind is purified by abstention, the permanent rites, sacrifices, and austerities,'[21] and he cites appropriate qualifications necessary to the proper study of the Vedas. These are described generally as disinclination towards pleasure, concentration, faith, patience, peace, intense desire for salvation and discrimination between the eternal and non-eternal.[22] It is in these preliminary measures – these antecedent conditions – that we find the efficacy of social morality, general meditative activities and devotionalism. These are features of positive *māyā* – aspects which have no ultimate significance but play a role in helping the individual to a preliminary awareness of the Real underlying phenomenal appearances. In regards to the eternal – non-eternal discrimination, Murti speaks of an emerging self-awareness that discriminates 'between the real and the unreal' and evinces 'an attitude of indifference to secular values'. Commenting upon these prerequisities for knowing Brahman, Murti goes on to say:

> On any other interpretation, this should be the *end, not the means* of knowing Brahman. In the desire to know the Absolute, there is the awareness of having alighted on something unique and valuable. The philosophical consciousness having emerged, it cannot be argued into existence, it is appreciated as a new mode of consciousness different from the secular. As yet, it is vague and undirected.[23]

The point, of course, is to clarify and focus this emerging discriminatory awareness through meditation upon the Vedas. But in regard to the preliminary qualifications through which this philosophical consciousness emerges, certain aspects of *māyā* are more spiritually beneficial than others. Śaṅkara suggests that the performance of religious injunctions (the works [*dharma*] according to one's *varnāśrama* [class and life-stage]), meditation, ritual worship and devotionalism can help one to achieve the antecedent conditions and the preliminary discriminatory awareness necessary for moksa. Eric Lott comments on the significance, and limitations, of theistic mysticism for Śaṅkara:

> But devotion implies a non-identical relationship, so no matter how characterised by mutual love, Śaṅkara can see it as only a preliminary stage, to be superseded in the ultimate experience of the one Self. Dependence on, trust in, love of another being can only be a provisional means to the pure identity of consciousness.'[24]

Though presumed to be a helpful means in this conception, theistic mysticism is not a *necessary* religious practice: Śaṅkara prescribes it as beneficial to those persons of 'narrow or poor intellect',[25] but it is not considered essential in achieving the preliminary qualifications. As Lott continues, 'at the moment of liberating insight, [the Sannyāsin] will certainly see that there is no *essential* connection between his life's actions and the conditions of ultimate enlightenment.'[26] Śaṅkara says that all actions are ultimately 'contradictory to the view of the identity [of *Ātman*] with the highest *Ātman* {Brahman}.'[27] But, much more important than this, we must ask how in this context theistic mysticism can be understood as even preliminary or provisional to monistic experiences.

Although Śaṅkara says that devotional activities can help to purify the devotee in preparation for liberating knowledge, the underlying processes of such preparation are not clarified. It is clear how devotional mysticism involves the distraction of the devotee away from secular interests and her or his ego. No doubt it might help one to achieve the antecedent conditions of concentration, patience, and peace. But it is not apparent how an active and personally devotional mysticism can be understood as developing the other antecedent conditions of disinclination towards pleasure, faith and desire for monistic salvation, and eternal and non-eternal discrimination. As developed in Chapter 2, monistic and theistic experiences are radically different types of realizations, contrasted in terms of staticity–activity, non-dualism–differentiation, and impersonalism–personalism.

The issue can be clarified in the question of how devotionalism can be understood as a positive mode of focus away from the *jīva*. Īśvara, the personal deity, is, like any other phenomenon, simply a manifestation of *māyā*, another aspect of the not-Self, that illusory appearance which hides the Real. Indeed, Nikhilananda refers to Īśvara as a 'corruption or deterioration of Brahman.'[28] Moreover, there is nothing about the *nature* of the monistic experiences and the monistic Real (static, non-dual and impersonal) that would give Īśvara and theistic union a special status. Īśvara is not an aspect or extension of *nirguṇa* Brahman. Although Brahman is often distinguished in terms of higher and lower, the Divine for Advaita is not ontologically both *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* Brahman. In experiencing *saguṇa* Brahman one is not realizing a facet of *nirguṇa* Brahman. Indeed, in theistic mysticism we can say one is experiencing an appearance of Brahman, but this appearance, as all appearances, is false, and must be overcome in intuitive insight. It is not an integral part of Brahman: Murti says 'appearance . . . is not an integral aspect of the real'. In fact, the "real never appears; it is all depth, substance and no surface.'[29] The Real is wholly other than *saguṇa* Brahman.

The Advaitin admits that theistic experiences are non-essential to the monistic. But these experiences can be interpreted as effective means in overcoming one's egoic attachment to individual selfhood, as the devotee gradually merges in mutual love her personality with that of Īśvara. However, even if we allow for the importance of theistic devotionalism in overcoming egoism, the

experience possesses no integral connection to the monistic ideal. In fact, in so far as an active and intimate spiritual relationship between an individual and a personal God involves a focusing upon the not-Self, emotional energies, and an active interplay of consciousness, it seems ultimately counter-productive to the monistic ideal. Although theistic mysticism has its positive role in overcoming egoism, its affective consequences might very well play a negative role in the spiritual progression. Not only is it superfluous to the ideal, it might very well inhibit its achievement. Other meditative methods would seem to be more effective in triggering monistic realizations. This holds true even for lower level theistic experiences in the theo-monistic hierarchy. Eckhart, for example, urges in the pursuit of monism that 'we pray God to rid us of "God" so that we may grasp and eternally enjoy the truth where the highest angel and the fly and the soul are equal.'[30] But most importantly, in a monistic hierarchy theistic experiences prove ultimately in the higher light of monistic unity to be inauthentic and illusory. Clearly, unless some ontological connection is made between *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* Brahman, theistic experiences cannot be authenticated in terms of a higher level monistic ideal. Rather, the nature and content of the lower level experiences are quite alien to the monistic ideal.

We can approach this issue from a slightly different angle. Advaita has been criticized for its apparent antinomian ideal, wherein the monistic goal is thought to entail an amoral and inactive stance on the part of the *jīvanmukta* (released soul). The *jīvanmukta* is free from the obligations of social morality; more than this, since the ideal involves no binding karmic consequences, the *jīvanmukta* does not properly 'act'. That is to say, his behaviour is no longer from the standpoint of personal desire; he ceases to accumulate karmic residues, which means he does not act in the manner of unenlightened action. Hence he no longer practices moral activity. Śankara comments: 'Therefore after the knowledge of the meaning of the sentence [has been realized] there cannot be any injunction to action, since two contradictory notions, "I am *Brahman*" and "I am an agent", do not [co-]exist.'[31]

But this does not mean that the *jīvanmukta* may behave immorally, for he must naturally perform the *saṁskāras* (latent potencies or tendencies) wound up in previously accumulated karma (*prārabdhakarman*). The highly moral nature of the conditions of

release ensure that the *behaviour* (though he acts no more, he continues to behave) of the *jīvanmukta* will not be immoral from the lower vantage point of the unenlightened person. The *jīvanmukta* does not act in terms of his enlightened perspective – he accumulates no further karma – he only *'re-acts'* according to the residues of previously accumulated karma. But, as Karl Potter puts it, given the highly developed moral character of the *jīvanmukta* prior to liberation, 'He has no evil karmic residues to spawn opposing *vāsanās* [latent tendencies].'[32] His reactive behaviour will only be moral, even though he has achieved an amoral and static realization.

However, the point here is that it is misleading to speak of the enlightened orientation of the *jīvanmukta* as 'actively' moral and loving, as 'exuding' compassion or as 'expressing' beneficence. His 'active' moral behaviour is not properly action, it will apparently wane and finally cease as the *prārabdhakarman* are gradually actualized, and, most importantly, it cannot be attributed to the nature of the liberating experience or the character of the monistic Real. As I suggested in Chapter 2, in so far as the *jīvanmukta* or the experience of the Real is characterized as an active source of moral behaviour, this implies a theo-monistic experience and Divine, not a monistic experience and Divine. Moreover, the amoral and inactive nature of the final monistic ideal underlines the rift between theistic and monistic experiences in the monistic hierarchy. The active moral components wound up in personalist theistic mysticism are not reinforced, affirmed or validated in a monistic hierarchy. Rather, they have no place in the monistic ideal.

So, although theistic experiences can be connected to the monistic ideal in terms of their possibly beneficial role in achieving preliminary conditions of release, there is no necessary connection between theistic and monistic realizations, nor is there an essential dependence of the higher experiences upon the nature and processes involved in the lower. Moreover, the content of theistic experiences is not authenticated or affirmed in terms of higher monism; ultimately, the nature and affective conditions of theistic mysticism prove to be illusory. So, as a typology of mystic pluralism, monistic mysticism fails to establish the hierarchy of mystic transformation in terms of the nature and processes of lower level theistic mystical experiences.

III THEISTIC HIERARCHIES

A theistic hierarchy, on the other hand, can ground itself in the nature and processes of lower level monistic experiences. To begin to illustrate this we can turn to Śaṅkara's traditional Vedāntin rival, Rāmānuja. Rāmānuja espouses *viśiṣṭādvaita* Vedānta, or qualified non-dualism. He proposes a 'body-ensouler' model which depicts Brahman as ensouling both *cit* (conscious individual *jīvas*) and *acit* (inconscient *prakṛti* [matter]), which are symbolized as the body of this personal Brahman. Julius Lipner comments on the qualifying mode of this model, how it is intended to illustrate an identity-in-difference, rather than a strict dualism or monism: 'to say that the world (or an individual) is Brahman's body is to say that the world (or an individual) is in some respect at the same time both non-different from and yet not identical with Brahman'.[33] Rāmānuja thus proposes a view of this world and individual *jīvas* which stands in stark contrast to Śaṅkara's understanding of *māyā*. This realm is intimately connected with Brahman, which despite its transcendent independence is nevertheless involved with individual *jīvas* in an active and personal relationship of such intimacy that these *jīvas* can be modelled as the very body of this ensouling Brahman – as the modes of Brahman.

In correspondence to this theistic metaphysics, one might expect from Rāmānuja a disparagement of monistic experiences and isolating *dhyāna* (meditative) *yoga*, along with a prounounced emphasis upon theistic experiences and *karma* (active) and *bhakti* (devotional) *yoga*. The latter emphasis naturally permeates Rāmānuja's writings; he thinks the combination of knowledge and works ordinated towards 'the love of the Lord' to be the most effective mystic means.[34] But one is surprised to find Rāmānuja speaking of monistic experiences and *dhyāna yoga* in favourable terms. He writes in his commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā* very positively of the practice of *dhyāna yoga*, a form of meditation prescribed for the experience of one's true Self. Like Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja speaks similarly of qualifications necessary for proper meditation, as well as the importance of distinguishing the not-Self from the true Self. The point is to experience *ātman*, one's underlying Self. Release is only achieved when one 'completely renounces the experiencing of the external objects, finds his sole happiness in experiencing the ātman, is fixed totally on the ātman,

increases his happiness only by contemplating the ātman and its qualities [states of permanence, knowing, bliss, independence from karma, etc.].'[35] Morever, this experience would seem to extend beyond the isolated *ātman*, towards a transcendent unity, in so far as one also realizes 'that the ātmans are equal to one another because essentially they all have one and the same form, knowledge.'[36]

Indeed, in reference to the *kaivalyārthin* (isolationist) Rāmānuja explicitly characterizes this experience monistically, as the consequence of the overcoming of egoism and the revelation of one's underlying eternal, unified and transcendent Self. Lipner describes this goal as a '*samsāra*-transcendent state in which the liberated *ātman* reposes solipsistically in its intrinsic consciousness and bliss.'[37] At some level, either the interpretive or the phenomenological, this realization appears somewhat different than Advaitic monism. Lipner perceives a possible phenomonological distinction between the experience of the *kaivalyārthin* and that of the Advaitin – a solipsistic mysticism of isolated awareness of Self and a sublation mysticism involving a merging and identification with an ultimate One. Although both kinds of experiences are clearly monistic (non-dual, inactive, impersonal) there is some evidence to indicate that there are stages of monistic immersion corresponding to what Lipner calls 'enstatic' solipsistic repose, or silent witness *puruṣa*, and 'ecstatic' sublation, or Self-identification with the transcendent One.[38] Perhaps Rāmānuja is connoting this movement from Self-absorption to sublation awareness when he speaks of the experience of the equality of *ātmans* as equal in terms of their essential form. I will return to this possibility in Chapters 4 and 5. The important point here is that the monistic experience, according to Rāmānuja, is a permissible and legitimate goal, in so far as it involves transformative processes which allow for the overcoming of egoism. As Lipner says, though it is of a non-theistic nature, 'it can be regarded as liberation in that it implies a detachment from an egoistic immersion in materiality (*prakṛti*)'.[39]

There is a tension, however, in how this monistic experience of unity is compatible with that experience of *ātman* pursued by the *jñānin* (theistic 'aspirant to God')[40], where the ideal is one of realization of Self as a mode or votary of a personal Lord. It is explicitly clear that the experience of Self is a necessary ingredient

of Rāmānuja's mysticism; the highest experiences require a radical self-transformation, where one's sense of egoistic self is utterly overcome. He associates this transformative experience with the realization of *ātman*, and insists that this intuitive experience is necessary to higher communitive experiences.[41] But the problem is that it would appear that Rāmānuja proposes two types of *ātmā*-realizations, a monistic (associated with *dhyāna yoga*) and a theistic (associated with *karma* and *jñāna yoga*). Lipner explains that

> to all apearances the *ātmā*-vision desired by the *jñānin* is quite different from the *ātmā*-vision desired by the solipsist. The *ātmā*-vision desired by the *jñānin* is one which penetrates to the rootedness of the finite *ātman* in its ultimate source and goal, the Lord himself. . . . The *ātmā*-vision desired by the solipsist seems to be of a different order. There is no talk of intuiting the *ātman* as rooted in the Lord and as finding its fulfillment in divine communion.[42]

The monistic *ātmā*-vision of the *kaivalyārthin* is obviously quite different from the *ātmā*-vision of the *jñānin*. How are these two experiences to be reconciled? Lipner suggests that it is likely that Rāmānuja implies that the monistic vision will culminate, 'by the transforming impetus of the Lord's grace', in the higher theistic communion. He says:

> It is hard to see how any 'liberating' (and hence veridical) intuition of the *ātman* (including the *ātmā*-vision of the 'solipsist' when attained) can fail to comprise, sooner or later, the awareness that, as ensouling Self of the finite *ātman*, the Lord is the latter's ultimate source and goal. And this awareness would seem to demand fruition, on Rāmānuja's terms, in divine communion.[43]

So Lipner reads in Rāmānuja a natural movement of the *kaivalyārthin* from monistic immersion to theistic union. But there are other passages in Rāmānuja's commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā* which would indicate that the *ātmā*-monistic vision is not exclusive to the *kaivalyārthin* – that it is in fact simply preliminary to the *ātmā*-theistic vision. The most explicit passage in this regard is 7.16, where Rāmānuja distingishes the *kaivalyārthin* from the *jñāni*.

The former are 'those who aspire to acquire knowledge of the ātman as an entity different from prakṛti'. The latter are those who *'do not stop* at the mere knowledge of the ātman as an entity different from prakṛti', but 'who know the proper form of the ātman whose sole essence is to be a *śeṣa* [subordinate, dependent] of God' and 'wish to attain God himself, because they know that God alone is the highest aim to reach.'[44]

In what sense can we understand the *ātmā*-theistic vision as going beyond the *ātmā*-monistic? Although Rāmānuja does not seem to explicitly discuss the relationship, presumably the passive experience of unified existence, consciousness and bliss that arises in the lower level knowledge of *ātman* dissociated from the not-Self is to be somehow understood as a preliminary facet of the higher level *ātmā*-vision of Self. In the higher level experiences one realizes this Self as *more* than this essential Being, as also intimately connected with a personal God to which one's Self is intimately united in a relationship of active dependence. One is in a monistic sense not different from the Divine, and in a theistic sense not identical to the Divine. Then, through these two *ātmā*-realizations one can finally attain this personal God in terms of a positive and active union. Rāmānuja insists that higher level *bhakti* is dependent upon these *ātmā*-visions. He says: 'Knowledge of the ātman combined with karmayoga leads to jñānayoga; through jñānayoga one arrives at the true contemplation of the realizing ātman. This contemplation, again, is propaedeutic to bhaktiyoga; through bhakti alone one is capable of attaining God.'[45] So Rāmānuja speaks of a love which must inform the direct intuitive knowledge arising in monistic Self-realizations. Moreover, without the experience of transcendent Self, *bhakti* yoga remains tainted by egoistic dispositions. Knowledge of the intrinsic existence, consciousness and bliss of Self is a key aspect in this mystic transformation. But unlike Śaṅkara's view of the experiences, the two types of *ātmā* vision need not be understood to be of a different order at all. One's love, at this highest mystic stage must be utterly free of egoistic tendencies; it must be one arising out of the nakedness and purity of the released *ātman*, wherein one's essential divine nature is realized in an apophatic experience of passive unity with the Real, thereby opening up the *very possibility* of a positive and active divine communion as intimate mode, accessory or channel of the experienced Divine. For Rāmānuja, the

monistic experience can be understood as naturally connected to the higher theistic. Rāmānuja would seem to be espousing a theo-monistic framework.

Abhishiktānanda (Henry Le Saux), a contemporary Christian Sannyasin, interprets monistic Vedānta in this way. He sees it as a process of radical purification wherein the mystic is spiritually transformed through the apophatic stripping away of egoic self. He says:

> Vedantic ascesis seeks to strip man of his ego, his self, in a most radical fashion which no image or concept can adequately describe. Paradoxically one might perhaps say that it seeks to plunge the soul into that nothingness from which it has come. . . . And man can only be recreated in the very place in which he was created; his baptismal death plunges him into the very nothingness out of which he was created, in order to raise him up again.[46]

Abhishiktānanda interprets the monistic experience in terms of self-transformative processes which are necessary to higher theistic experiences, wherein the Divine is manifested through the mystic-channel. I will return to Abhishiktānanda's theology in a moment, and, in more detail, again in Chapter 5. But this experiential process corresponds to another Vedāntin thinker. Aurobindo Ghose also suggests that the two types of *ātmā*-realizations are intimately connected in terms of transformative operations in a movement from monistic unity to a theistic dynamic. He comments:

> When the Unity has been well founded, the static half of our work has been done, but the active half of our work remains. It is then that in the One we must see the Master and his Power, – Krishna and Kali as I name them using the terms of our Indian religions; the Power occupying the whole of myself and my nature which becomes Kali and ceases to be anything else, the Master using, directing, enjoying the Power to his ends, not mine, with that which I call myself only as a centre of his universal existence and responding to its workings as a soul to the Soul, taking upon itself his image until there is nothing left but Krishna and Kali.[47]

Aurobindo depicts the process as one requiring preliminary monistic experiences within which one's underlying Self unites in passive repose with the static essence of an active, personal Divine. In this way the mystic herself becomes a divine channel of the personal and creative Real. Moreover, Aurobindo suggests in this quotation the significance of this transformative operation for mystic pluralism. For this monistic-theistic movement does not depend upon the Vedāntic theological symbols of Rāmānuja and Aurobindo – even though Aurobindo prefers the terms of Hinduism – and the coherence of the process does not rest upon the authority of certain commentaries on the Vedas. It rests upon a phenomonological understanding of personal and spiritual transformative processes. The idea in the theo-monistic hierarchy is that one must experience a radical spiritual transformation in order to encounter most intimately an active and personal Real. Monistic experiences are associated with this transformation, as one uncovers and experiences their divine Self which lay hidden beneath a powerful and pervasive layer of egoism. But the idea can be expressed in terms of spiritual growth as well, as the soul develops in a gradual unfolding of itself, part of which requires an immersion and identification with the Source. Only through such soul-making can the mystic participate in the divine life of the higher realizations; the soul, the centre and focus of one's being, is that which is most intimately tied to an active and personal Real. Through realization of the essential unity of the Source of one-Self and all things one opens up the possibility of divine communion. One must dissociate oneself from all that is other than the essential Self, completely emptying oneself, so to speak, of all things, and experiencing in this very radical self-surrender and self-abandonment the negative passive unity of Self that constitutes the very basis of one's being, as well as the essence of other people and the personal Real. Only then does one open up the highest theistic possibilities. Aurobindo comments:

> This approach through adoration can get its full power and impetus only when the mind goes beyond the impersonality to the awareness of a supreme Personal Being: . . . The nascent spiritual man makes his appearance in the emotional nature as the devotee, the bhakta; if, in addition, he becomes directly aware of his soul and its dictates [unchanging Self, pure bare-

ness of essential Existence, formless Infinite, nameless Absolute], *unites his emotional with his psychic personality* and changes his life and vital parts by purity, . . . he develops into the saint and reaches the highest inner experience and most considerable change of nature proper to this way of approach to the Divine Being.[48]

IV THEISTIC HIERARCHIES AND MYSTIC PLURALISM

I will return to Aurobindo's theo-monistic account in Chapter 4. But, as I developed in Chapter 2, in certain Christian mystic traditions we find a theistic hierarchy which also establishes the necessity of monistic experiences in terms of the nature of the higher theistic. Although these mystic traditions incorporate symbols foreign to the Vedāntic theologies we have outlined above, the experiential framework implied in the symbols corresponds nevertheless in many respects to Rāmānuja's theistic hierarchy. This allows us to draw out a theo-monistic mystic pluralism without subordinating any religious perspective to a particular dogmatic theology. The mystic pluralism coheres in terms of the nature and relationship of various authentic processes and experiences which are open to a variety of symbolic interpretations.

Jan Van Ruusbroec, for example, proposes an apophatic transformation very much like Rāmānuja's, one which he considers essential to his theistic hierarchy. He says, 'all holiness and blessedness is dependent on the soul being led, through its likeness to God and through the means of grace or of glory, to rest in the essential unity.'[49] The primary aspect of the human being is intimately connected with the essential nature of the Real, and must be uncovered and realised in order for higher spiritual advancement. He speaks of a 'unity without mean with God' which must be experienced 'according to the manner required by our simplicity of being.'[50] The process is one of a radical detachment from sensual existence, a stripping away of that which is not this essential being and a movement from this differentiated and mutable realm to that of passive simplicity and unity. Ruusbroec describes the apophatic experience of God without mean as a revelation of 'darkness, nakedness and nothing. . . . In the nakedness he will

lose his observation and perception of all things, and he will be formed again and infused with a single clarity.'[51]

This transformation parallels Rāmānuja's distinction between two types of *ātmā*-vision. Concerning the *ātmā*-monistic realization, Ruusbroec says: 'And so united, and without mean one with the Spirit of God, so can we in God meet with God, and with Him and in Him livingly possess our everlasting blessedness.'[52] Ruusbroek speaks of an essential unity necessary to theistic realizations, much in the manner that Rāmānuja espouses *ātmā*-monistic identification. The process requires a realization of Self, what Ruusbroec calls an experience of emptiness, unity and rest that a person can achieve when 'he is empty and undistracted in his senses by images, and free and unoccupied in his highest powers'.[53] Referring to Christian Trinitarian theology, he speaks of an absorption into the essence of the Divine – an immersion into

> a wayless abyss of fathomless beatitude where the Trinity of the Divine Persons possess their nature in the essential unity. Behold this beatitude is so onefold and so wayless that in it every . . . creaturely distinction ceases and passes away. . . . There all light is turned to darkness; there the three Persons give place to the essential unity and abide without distinction. . . . For that beatific state . . . is so simple and so onefold that neither Father, nor Son, nor Holy Ghost is distinct according to Persons.[54]

This account seems to correspond closely to the monistic experience of Brahman which we find in Advaitic thought, and which we saw recounted in Rāmānuja's descriptions of the *ātmā*-vision of Self. This is definitely an experience of undifferentiated unity, beyond distinctions and multiplicity. Moreover, Ruusbroec, like other Christian mystics, writes passionately of the tremendous affective power of this wondrous encounter with the inactive and qualityless Godhead. This radical self-emptying is a necessary aspect of the apophatic mystic process, and opens up the possibility of higher cataphatic experiences. One must become simple and one as God is; in order to experience God theistically in her highest forms one has to encounter in oneself the Real in her

most essential modes. In this sense, theo-monistic realizations authenticate and reinforce the reality of the monistic immersion. In reference to this monistic-type experience Abhishiktānanda, who also recognizes the significance of monistic realizations for Christian mysticism, says:

> Truly to find God, man has to descend to that level of his own being at which he is nothing but the image of God, to the place where, at the very source of his being, nothing exists but God. Short of that, he will only have direct contact with God as reflected in his thought or his consciousness. No doubt his love penetrates further than does his understanding; and the impulses of love certainly reaches straight to the heart of God. Even so there are depths of love which seem only to be possible when the ultimate recesses of the self have been laid bare.[55]

So the monistic *ātmā*-realization is a necessary feature of the spiritual transformation in this theistic hierarchy and monistic immersion is affirmed and authenticated in higher level theistic experiences. Abhishiktānanda speaks of the monistic experience as a 'baptismal death', a process wherein the mystic moves away from the difference which separates her from the divine Source, dies to her ego and is reborn out of the unity of the essential Self and Spirit as channel of the qualities of an active and personal Real. He says, the ' "death" implied in advaitic experience is an essential stage in man's growth into himself. From the Christian point of view it seems to be the culminating point of the Spirit's work in preparing the individual for the glory that is ultimately to be manifested in him.'[56] Both Rāmānuja and Ruusbroec consider this passive experience of unity ideally to culminate in a personal union, where one's simple and unified being is realized in an active intimate relationship of love with the Real. As Louis Dupré comments: 'Without love the initial assumption of ontological unity degenerates into the reified representation of a mind "located" within the divine Logos. For Ruusbroec, the mind, instead of being a mere segment of the real, functions as an active lever of being: the mystical life renders it constitutive of the real.'[57] One must recognize in this apophatic ecstacy of radical purification one's essential rootedness in an active personal Real. Ruusbroec says: 'In the nothing all his works will fail him, for in the working

of the unfathomable love of God he will be conquered. And in the delectable inclination of his spirit he conquers God, and becomes one spirit with Him.'[58] This enables the mystic to experience the active Divine which issues forth from this essential unity; out of the apophatic repose one can become an active participant of love in the divine life.

Indeed, Ruusbroec goes on to describe higher experiences of *bhakti* which are dependent upon these lower level monistic-theistic experiences. As he puts it, 'This exalted unity of the Divine nature is a living, fertile unity.'[59] He says: 'and out of these riches there flows into the unity of his superior powers the embrace and fullness of sensible love.'[60] This *bhakti*, however, extends well beyond the privacy of mystical union with the Real, and draws the theo-monistic hierarchy coherently together. Describing Ruusbroec's experience of the relationship between passive unity and active communion, Dupré says 'in this blissful union the soul comes to share the dynamics of God's inner life, a life not only of rest and darkness, but also of creative activity and light.'[61] As divinized being one actively communicates the qualities of this personal Real. In Rāmānuja's words, one lives as a 'mode' or 'votary' of this personal Real. One creatively expresses the energies and powers that exude from the transformative theo-monistic experiences. Ruusbroec comments:

> Thus man has achieved this just and due proportion, and goes towards God with fervent love in everlasting works, and goes into God with a delectable inclination in everlasting rest, and remains in God and yet goes out towards all creatures in a love that is common in virtues and in righteousness. And this is the highest form of the inward life.[62]

So we see the similarities in experiential transformation within a theistic hierarchy between a Hindu and a Christian mystic of very diverse theological orientations. Unlike the monistic hierarchy, this theistic framework shows explicitly the coherence of related transformative experiences conveyed through different symbolic interpretations. In this mystic pluralistic perspective an active theistic mysticism oriented around creativity, compassion and love is considered to be religion in its highest form, though not one which degrades other authentic religious experiences.

The hierarchy draws the monistic experiences into the theistic framework, explicitly showing their relationship to both the higher theistic experiences and the *very nature* of the Real. Unlike the Advaitic monistic hierarchy, it proposes the necessary dependence of higher level mystical experiences upon lower realizations. It authenticates monistic experiences in terms of the theistic ideal and integrates the different realizations in terms of transformative processes and the very nature of the theo-monistic Real. Theo-monistic mysticism derives its coherence in the understanding of the nature of common mystic processes and experiences, and grants a genuine validity to a wide variety of religious symbolism and doctrine.

A number of issues remain: we have not shown how experiences of nature mysticism, the numinous and the paranormal fit coherently into the framework, and the question remains regarding the nature and status of those mystics who, in denying the validity of higher theistic experiences, choose to remain in the quietistic repose of the passive and isolating monistic experiences. These difficulties will be addressed in Chapter 5. I will turn now, in Chapter 4, to examine the implications that theo-monism has upon the conceptions of the Divine, and show how the impersonal-personal dialectic of the Divine is reconciled by some mystics at both a practical and theoretical level.

4

The Dialectic of the Divine

I THE APOPHATIC DIVINE

The theo-monistic experience explains the relationship between monistic and theistic mystical experiences. Considered in terms of personal and spiritual transformative processes, the two different experiences are effectively bridged together. The monistic experience finds its culmination and meaning in elements associated with theistic conceptions; so the monistic experience is legitimately and coherently drawn into the theistic mystical perspective.

In Chapter 3, I showed that monistic hierarchies cannot grant theistic experiences an authenticity in terms of the monistic framework; hence the difficulties in attempts to synthesize various mystical experiences through a monistic ideal. But considered from the theo-monistic perspective, the monist moves from a passivity to a dynamism, from a non-dualistic realization of an amoral nature to a rediscovery of transmuted Self which uniquely expresses through the individual mystic-channel the active, creative, and personal energies which issue from this Source. Although we find the process expressed in various ways and degrees in the different mystical traditions, it can be explained in non-theological, neutral phenomenological terms. It is aptly described generally as the monistic movement to personalist mysticism; more specifically it is the mystic identification with that Source of potential energy through which arises their essential being as persons. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, this is what Donald Evans calls transparent mysticism, where the mystic transcends personality, wholly emptying herself of consciousness. Through mystical practices of purification, monistic mystics render themselves transparent to this apophatic Source.[1] Louis Dupré refers to the process as a connatural knowing – an intellectual intuition of the divine core of one's self rather than a normal relational experience – where he says the mind functions 'in the different mode of being-with reality, rather than of reflecting upon it'.[2]

But personalist monists do not remain in this non-relational condition of being with essential Source. Their contemplative trance-state gives way to an outward oriented expression of that which issues from the Source. Evans calls this translucent mysticism; the monistic mystic transmits those powers arising from the monistic Source of Self, through the categories of interpretation that she had previously overcome in monistic transparency. The monistic mystic becomes a translucent medium of dynamic personalist forces emanating from the Source – not an examplar of static and impersonal monism. She expresses characteristics quite different from the static state of monistic immersion. The personalist monist becomes a personal and moral medium of this Source. But this transformative process would seem to imply that this Source is both passive and active, non-dualistic and distinctive, impersonal and personal.

In this chapter I hope to clarify further the Divine implicit in this spiritual transformation. Indeed, personalist monists propose a fascinating reconciliation of paradoxical divine attributes. Moreover, it is very striking that these mystics reflect so closely the classical theistic notions of a transcendent and supreme Being, even though their monistic descriptions are non-theistic. They affirm traditional rational scholastic conceptions that stress the otherness of the Real, its uniqueness, impassibility and transcendence. The monistic Source is given various names by different mystics: Nothingness, Emptiness, Suchness, Pure Being, the Abyss, the One, Unity, Simple, Actual, Eternal, and so on. These descriptions all underscore the transcendent nature of the Source of their experience, exemplifying the surprising parallels between monistic mysticism and classical theism in this respect. For the Divine-human intimacy of mystical experiences appears to conflict with the notions of utter transcendence espoused by classical theists.

John Macquarrie, who recognizes the immanent-transcendent dialectic at play in Christian theology, is deeply critical of traditional theistic conceptions which emphasise only the transcendent side of the divine nature; its wholly otherness, monarchial sovereignty, and passive and impassible distance from creation and people. He proposes a dialectical theism which stresses divine passibility, active involvement in creation, and personality, despite the emphasis of transcendence in classical theism.[3] Theo-

monistic mysticism provides a spiritual teleology that effectively bridges the dialectic.

I will begin by focusing on the transcendent attributes of the divine nature that are common to mystic theology. I will briefly examine and compare Bonaventure's and Aurobindo's ontological theology. However, it is important to note at the outset that both mystics insist also on the divine presence in the natural world. In chapters I and II of *The Journey of the Mind to God*,[4] Bonaventure focuses his mystical ascent upon the presence of the images and traces of the Divine in nature. God can be contemplated not only *through* traces in the universe but also *in* them. Indeed, Bonaventure argues that creatures 'are the shadow, echo, image, vestige, likeness, and representation of that most good, most wise, and most powerful first Principle'.[5] But in contrast to this positive presence of the Divine in creation, Bonaventure provides in chapter V a deductive exposition of negative ontological terminology, one that stresses apophatic transcendence as one of the mystical goals.[6] He begins with pure Being, the dependence of the Real upon nothing for its existence. This means that it is the only Reality whose essence is its existence. This also means it is First, which implies also that it is Eternal – without predecessor. As First and Eternal, this pure Being is utterly independent, which is to say it is Simple or non-composite Being. But this is also to insist upon its Actuality, for potentiality would necessitate some external influence that brings it to fulfillment. As wholly fulfilled, it is Perfect which is to say it is One or Unity; another would impinge upon this Perfection. For Bonaventure, then, the Source is pure Being, First, Eternal, Simple, Perfect and One; this is to say it is without cause and predecessor, out of space and time, is without parts, does not grow and change, and is without equal. It is wholly other than this caused, temporal, spatial, changing, growing, composite, distinctive reality we are and in which we participate. So the Source in this definition is non-dual, impersonal, and inactive: this is the monistic account of the Source I developed in Chapter 2.

Let us briefly compare Aurobindo's Vedāntic account. Aurobindo contrasts two modes of Brahman: *kṣara puruṣa* and *akṣara puruṣa*. First there is that which is associated with this created, finite realm, the *puruṣa* or spirit in and behind temporal, spatial existence (*prakṛti*), what he calls *kṣara* (mobile, mutable) *puruṣa*.

Puruṣa in the *kṣara* lies latent and dormant, the hidden source of vitality behind the movement, mutation and becoming of nature. Aurobindo says: 'The presence of the Spirit is there in every being, on every level, in all things . . . delight of divine presence, closeness, contact can be acquired through the mind or the life sense or even through the physical consciousness.'[7] The *kṣara*, then, corresponds to Bonaventure's account of the divine presence in the natural realm. Indeed, both mystics provide an account of nature or extrovertive mysticism, wherein the Divine is realized through and in natural phenomena. For Aurobindo, this *kṣara puruṣa* is starkly contrasted from *puruṣa* that stands apart from and in passive witness of *prakṛti*, what he terms *akṣara* (immobile, immutable) *puruṣa*. This is the static, unchanging Divine that is radically distanced and isolated from *prakṛti*.[8] Later in this chapter I will discuss the relationship between *kṣara* and *akṣara puruṣa*. But conceived as the Source, Aurobindo depicts this *akṣara* mode of Brahman as the Self-existent, a pure Being which is Absolute and Infinite. This *puruṣa* correlates to Bonaventure's notion of pure Being. As Absolute it is incomparable and, therefore, indeterminable. As Infinite, it is wholly other than finite realities, and consequently qualityless, propertyless, featureless, nameless, formless, timeless and spaceless. Moreover, it is the unified One which means that it is the Immutable, for change would eliminate its unity.[9] But this is to deduce, like Bonaventure, that this Self-existent is wholly other than this caused, temporal, spatial, changing, growing, composite, distinctive reality we are and in which we participate.

Are Bonaventure and Aurobindo speaking about the same Source? They both use very similar negative ontological terminology, descriptions which are common to monistic mysticism. What do these accounts tell us about the Source? Although the deductive processes of Aurobindo and Bonaventure consist of negative, ontological terminology, they are not purely valuational and non-descriptive.[10] To deny a description is to make one. These reports are not utterly meaningless; they tell us what this Source is not. It is depicted by both mystics as wholly other than anything we can see or know – it is non-dual, impersonal and inactive. Moreover, both mystics agree that the Source is not a discrete phenomenon to be identified conceptually. Still, we can never know for sure through conceptual analysis whether the two descriptions are

of the same Source, because we lack the positive characterization necessary for such determination. But, on the other hand, neither can we conclude that the references indicate different Sources; for when the content is clarified it is clear that they agree, like all monistic accounts, on key common elements, and, despite some different terms of ascription, they disagree on nothing. This Source is wholly other than everything we can see or know: it is non-dual, impersonal and inactive. Moreover, as I will clarify even more fully than I have developed already in previous chapters, the common affective powers of the mystic immersion in the Source imply the same Source. So, if we are to assume that these mystics are speaking of some reality rather than nothing at all, these similarities lead us to posit, until evidence is presented to the contrary, that these mystics are referring to the same Source.

The similar affective consequences of monistic experience, the common mystical means, and the way the experience is depicted over and against spatial-temporal reality, suggest that these mystics are referring to the same monistic Source. A more difficult problem is connecting this transcendent Source with this realm. This is illustrated in John Macquarrie's dialectical theism – the attempt to coherently relate the conceptions of immanence with the transcendent emphasis of the classical theist. The Divine is thought to be both transcendent and immanent, impassible yet passible, immutable yet mutable, eternal yet temporal, static sovereign yet actively personal. But we can deduce no notion of activity and personality from the premises of negative theology; and these are essential elements indeed to rational theistic theology. Classical theists insist on the Deity's role as Creator and *moral* ruler, as all-benevolent and compassionate judge of the moral law, though they nevertheless insist on its transcendent and impassible stature. Yet these active personalist conceptions seem utterly incompatible with the negative terminology we have examined. Apophatic discourse – negative theology – boldly depicts in non-anthropmorphic terms what must be an eternal and spaceless Divine. But in the process it brings into question theistic personalism and activity. In focusing upon the negative, transcendent nature of the Divine, one ignores these elements. Positive human analogies are powerless in conceptualizing a pure Being whose essence is its existence, and whose utter simplicity,

actuality and non-caused nature defy even superlative personal connotations. Through such depiction of an uncreated divine Source of existence, apophatic theology denies, in a sense, the reality and significance of the finite. The wholly Other does not simply surpass the forms of temporal-material existence, it refers to a different dimension of being. Apophatic theology neglects the finite in focusing on a radically wholly Other.

All too often, scholars ignore or downplay the radical differences between negative and positive theology, skipping over from negative descriptors of the Divine to positive attributes of creativity and personality, without attempting to reconcile the diverse implications of theological types. How, indeed, is the dialectic to be synthesized? Nicolai Berdyaev, for example, asks:

> How is the transition (or passage) from God to the world possible? – from the one to the many, from the eternal to the temporal? How has the Divine Trinity come into being? How was the creation of the world possible out of a divine nothing, an absolute? In what manner did the Creator appear? How did Personality disclose itself in God? The absolute of apophatic theology and of metaphysics cannot be Creator of the world. This God, Creator of cataphatic theology, is correlative to creation, to man.[11]

Berdyaev poses the problem from the Christian perspective. How can the God of rational scholasticism, the One or wholly Other, also be associated with positive and finite creation, as the ground of all being? The very same terms of the problem are expressed in a Hindu context by Krishna Sivaraman:

> The problematic of Vedanta which finds expression on almost every page of the Upanisads is really the problem of deity and deitas, concreteness and ultimacy, God and 'the God beyond God', their relation and balance. God's nature is not exhausted in his relationship to man as Creator or Providence. He is also something in himself out of all relations and functions, even the most internal of them. This is the Absolute. He is not merely a term of the relation of difference between God and the world. He is also the being of all things.[12]

The problem is a puzzling one. The idea of an apophatic Source is derived from conceptions of existence. Philosophers move from the apparent and given of positive metaphysics to a Source which is utterly negative and other – from causes to a first cause, composite reality to simple, the mutable to the immutable, the temporal to the eternal, the many to the one. Most importantly, however, these movements also necessarily swing us from the personal to the impersonal. Contemplation upon the origin of the finite pushes one to deduce a wholly Other that is radically distinct in nature from that which is thought to derive from it, distinct even from the notion of an active personal God. What is the relation between the apophatic and cataphatic Divine? And how can the finite arise from the Divine of apophatic theology? How are these negative and positive elements to be coherently synthesized?

In certain Hindu and Christian mystic traditions, the integration of the dual aspects of the Divine, as well as that of the apophatic Divine to the created realm, occurs at two levels: the practical and the theoretical. The theoretical proposes a divine theogonic process, wherein the Divine is conceived as both passive and dynamic, and these two powers or modes are linked together in terms of a mysterious will that also extends to the finite realm. The practical level involves the synthesis of the dichotomy through the analysis of mystic transformation – a developmental process that reflects both aspects of the Divine, and confirms the mystic philosophy of the theoretical level. Although this practical process has already been clarified in previous chapters, I will more fully elucidate Aurobindo's view, and show how it confirms the theoretical integration. I will begin with the theoretical account.

II THE THEORETICAL INTEGRATION

The theoretical intregration involves mystic philosophy that depends upon and reflects mystic practice and experience. This link draws together philosophically the connection between a passive and active Divine, and an impersonal and personal Divine. We can begin to develop this harmonization in reference to Ramakrishna. He attempts to harmonize the distinction as follows:

> When I think of the Supreme Being as inactive – neither creating nor preserving nor destroying – I call him Brahman or Purusha, the Impersonal God. When I think of him as active – creating preserving, and destroying – I call Him Śakti or Māyā or Prakriti, the personal God. But the distinction between them does not mean a difference. The Personal and the Impersonal are the same thing, like milk and its whiteness, the diamond and its lustre, the snake and its wriggling motion. It is impossible to conceive of one without the other. The Divine Mother and Brahman are one.[13]

Ramakrishna distinguishes here between the thing in itself, and the object as it is in its appearance and activity. But the power of these analogies is severely restricted because Ramakrishna does not make it clear how these natural examples correspond to the Divine. Nevertheless, when we draw the notion of person into the analogies, they become much more illuminating. In theomonism there is thought to be an apophatic source of the personality, a mysterious impersonal core or center from which arises personal self-consciousness and the other various distinctive qualities of the human being. Eckhart refers to this as the peak or apex of the soul, as I discussed in Chapter 2. Rāmānuja speaks of this personal core as the *ātman* and Aurobindo calls it the *jīvātman*. Both mystics consider it to underlie the psychic being or *jīva* or soul of the person. Now we would not speak of the attributes of a person as distinct and separate from their personal source. Indeed the whole constitutes the person, and we can speak of one particular individual or self. This analogy is formally similar to one suggested by Robert McKim, who argues that there might be different approaches and aspects in the experience of the Divine. He says: 'The difference between [the impersonal and the personal nature of the Divine] might be analogous to the difference between, on the one hand, a mind as encountered from the outside, and on the other hand, a mind as participated in the inside'.[14] On the grounds of this kind of analogy, McKim suggests that it is a coherent possibility that the Source or Real is both personal and impersonal in nature. Similarly, theo-monists suggest, in the Divine there is an impersonal source and a creative personality – there is a theogonic process at work in what we would nevertheless call a singular Divine.

Speculation about this 'Divine Genesis', as Berdyaev refers to the theogonic process,[15] can be found both in Vedāntic and Christian mystical theology. To begin to illustrate the parallel, we can continue to clarify the analogy of personality. The *Bhagavad Gītā*, for example, espouses a voluntarism that can be analogously predicated to the Divine. It depicts the will as the element of energy essential to the human personality:

> The senses are supreme, they say. The *manas* [mind] is greater than the senses. The intellect is greater than the *manas*. But what is greater than the intellect is that (desire). Thus, knowing that which is greater than the intellect and establishing the *manas* with the help of the intellect (in *karma–yoga*), O mighty armed (Arjuna), kill this enemy which is in the form of desire and is difficult to be reached.[16]

The *Gītā* characterizes *kama* (desire), as more fundamental even than the *manas* (sense-mind) and the *buddhi* (intellect). Indeed, it provides the energy which drives human consciousness and personality. In this sense it is primary to the intellect, mind, emotions and senses. Rāmānuja refers to *kama* as the personal will which originates in *rajas*. *Rajas* is the *guna* (quality) of *prakṛti* (nature) which provides the primal impetus of the natural world and human nature. This desire or will not only brings the creative impulses to the individual but it also attaches the person to the realm of the senses in its seeking for satisfaction through objects of the sensible realm. This begins to explain the inhibitive mode of the finite in relation to the apophatic Source, as it is conceived by theo-monists. In this dynamic process where the will ever-seeks to satisfy itself, one's latent true Self or *ātman*, which connects the person to the apophatic Source, remains hidden behind and beyond the dynamic play. So desire functions in two ways: it has a power of projection in the senses of ambition, aim, and activity, and it has one of concealment, in the sense of obscuring one's underlying divine nature from oneself. The two modes parallel the concept of *māyā* in Vedantic thought, extending the psychology of primal will to Hindu cosmology.

Rāmānuja refers to the will of Kṛṣṇa as the creative force of this natural realm, a 'will which originates, sustains and rules the beings'.[17] Śaṅkara also speaks of Īśvara, the personal God who

creates through the *śakti* (power or will) of *māyā*. In association with *māyā* Brahman creates, preserves and dissolves; *māyā* is the *upadana*, the material cause of the cosmos.[18] Swami Nikhilananda comments on this Advaitic perspective: 'Brahman, through association with māyā, . . . appears to be endowed with such activities as creation, preservation, and dissolution, and with such attributes as omniscience, omnipresence, and lordship, and becomes known as the Saguna Brahman.'[19] The *saguṇa* Brahman is Brahman with qualities, in contrast to the *nirguṇa*, which is the apophatic Divine Essence, one without qualities. *Saguṇa* Brahman arises in the association of Brahman with *māyā*. It is identified with various deities in Hindu thought, including Brahma, Śiva, Viṣṇu, Īśvara, Śakti, and the Mother. Moreover, there are streams in Hindu thought that depict the source of *māyā* as *nirguṇa* Brahman itself and, consistent with the processes of theo-monism, grant an ontological status to *māyā*.

For example, besides Rāmānuja, Aurobindo also speaks of the real formative powers of *māyā*, describing *māyā* as a particular mode or power of the Divine. Although in Advaita the term has come to take on pejorative connotations, such as illusion or enchantment, Aurobindo says in its original sense *māyā* 'meant a comprehending and containing consciousness capable of embracing, measuring and limiting, and therefore formative; it is that which outlines, measures out, moulds forms in the formless, psychologises and seems to make knowable the Unknowable, and geometrises and seems to make measurable the limitless'.[20] Indeed, he speaks of the mystic experience of this elusive impersonal power of *nirguṇa* Brahman, 'a direct touch with cosmic forces and with the occult movements of Universal Nature'.[21] But in Vedāntic thought this creative mode of cosmic *māyā* naturally conceals ultimate truth, no matter what status it be granted ontologically. Whether it is regarded as real or unreal or neither, *māyā* is in some sense distanced and apart from both Brahman and *ātman;* and in so far as it induces the individual to consider it the fundamental datum of importance, it conceals the truth. Hence the two modes of *māyā*, projection and concealment, are naturally inter-related.

In terms of its power of projection, *māyā* is a mysterious power of the apophatic Source that is associated with an active, willful Divine. Aurobindo refers to this aspect of the Divine as Īśvara, the

Lord. More than this, *māyā* only becomes the creative instrument of this active Divine, fully conscious and personal, in the form of Śakti, or the Divine Mother-Energy. Aurobindo speaks of Īśvara as the creator and Śakti as the creatix, distinguishing within a single creative power the will or energy source and the formative or ordering capacity of the divine expression:

> the Divine Mother-Energy as the universal creatix, Maya, Para-Prakriti, Chit-Shakti, manifests the cosmic Self and Ishwara and her own self-power as a dual principle; it is through her that the Being, the Self, the Ishwara, acts and he does nothing except by her; though his Will is implicit in her, it is she who works out all as the supreme Consciousness-Force who holds all souls and beings within her and as executive Nature; all exists and acts according to nature, all is the Consciousness-Force manifesting and playing with the Being in millions of forms and movements into which she casts his existence.[22]

It is natural but misleading to speak of eternal Īśvara in the form of *māyā* as 'arising' or 'deriving' from *nirguṇa* Brahman. But Aurobindo argues that the personal consciousness and power of the Divine takes precedence in the mystic theogony over the impersonal elements. He says: 'If we look at things from a larger point of view, we might say that what is impersonal is only a power of the Person: existence itself has no meaning without an Existent, consciousness has no standing-place if there is none who is conscious, delight is useless and invalid without an enjoyer. . . .'[23] So Aurobindo places monistic *saccidānanda* (existence, consciousness, bliss) within the over-riding context of a personal Divine, and prefers to speak of *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa* Brahman as dual aspects of Īśvara's being, both of which can be experienced mystically. In this respect, there are a variety of possible experiences of representative powers and personalities of Īśvara, including, for example, Brahman (personality of existence), Viṣṇu (personality of consciousness), Śiva (personality of force) and Kṛṣṇa (personality of *ānanda*).[24] In regards to *māyā* in a personal form, Aurobindo does speak of the creative and destructive power of Śiva, as well as the more ordinated, constructive form of Īśvara-Śakti. Aurobindo emphasises the dual gender of Īśvara, Īśvara-Śakti, the masculine and the feminine cosmic

principles unified and active in the personal Divine. These, too, can be experienced distinctively in theo-monistic encounters.[25] The feminine Śakti is considered to be the mediator between the one and the many, the consciousness-force behind cosmic processes that are overseen and governed by Īśvara. *Māyā*, then, is the Divine that becomes active in the form of a divine will, Īśvara, who is Lord and Master of creation; and this will then creates and manifests itself in terms of the formative powers of the Divine-Mother, who orders the cosmos.

There is a strong resemblance to this theogonic speculation in Jacob Boehme's Christian mysticism of the will. Boehme also speaks of a divine Mother who acts as the formative power of an active Deity who, in turn, also possesses an inactive and qualityless mode. The feminine here is Sophia or Wisdom, she who constitutes the structuring or formative idea of the divine consciousness, and brings order to the active will of the Divine. Boehme says, 'she has the Deep of the Wonders of the Omnipotence, and opens them; and she has the strong *Fiat* of God for an Instrument [to work with] whereby she creates, and did create all in the Beginning, and she discovers herself in all created Things, so that (by her) the Wonders of all Things are brought to the Day-light.'[26] Wisdom, like Śakti, is the mediator between the apophatic source and creation. Boehme associates her with the second principle of the Divine Essence, the Word or Son, but she derives her creative energy from the first principle of the Divine Essence, what Boehme refers to as the Father of the Trinity. These two principles correspond to Aurobindo's Īśvara-Śakti, and the mode of the Divine beyond these principles of the Divine Essence corresponds to *nirguṇa* Brahman; it is the apophatic unity, Eckhart's and Ruusbroec's silent and static Godhead beyond the Trinity, the qualityless divine, the mysterious core or centre of the active and personal Divine. Boehme calls it the *Ungrund*, thus placing it as that which grounds the Trinity and all created being. For from this utter abyss arises a magical will, a primary active principle which, like *māyā*, brings the apophatic source to activity. From the apophatic unity issues forth a dynamic and creative will, what Boehme calls the Father of the Trinity, or the first principle of the Divine Essence. But the first principle only finds its order and direction in the second principle, in the Wisdom of the Son, which is also present in potency in the apophatic Source. Yet, like

Aurobindo, for Boehme it is more accurate to speak of these processes in terms of various modes of a personal God:

> God is the eternal One, or the greatest gentleness [stillness], so far as he exists in himself independently of his motion and manifestation. But in his motion he is called a God in trinity, that is, a triune Being, where we speak of three and yet but of one, and in accordance with which he is called the eternal Power and Word. This is the precious and supreme ground, and thus to be considered: The divine will shuts itself in a place to selfhood, as to power, and becomes active in itself; but also by its activity goes forth, and makes for itself an object, viz. wisdom, through which the ground and origin of all beings has arisen.[27]

Boehme conceives of Father-Wisdom in the way that Aurobindo draws the feminine and the masculine together in terms of Īśvara-Śakti. *Māyā* in the personal form of Īśvara-Śakti parallels Boehme's divine will in the personal form of Father-Wisdom. Personal God consists of both masculine and feminine energies, and both mystic traditions connect this personal Deity to the apophatic Source through the ideas of a magical will. There is continuously arising from the apophatic source a mysterious energy, an impetus to expand and create. In Hindu terms this is *māyā*; in Boehme's Christian mysticism this is primary will. This takes the form of a masculine-feminine Deity: Īśvara-Śakti or Father-Wisdom. But speaking in neutral, non-theological terms, this is an energy force that becomes personal and creative as it meshes with an ordinating principle also present in potency in the apophatic source. Moreover, both mystics exemplify the difficulties of mystic transformation in terms of the inhibiting effects of this creative will. I have already made mention of this aspect of *māyā* in reference to the *Gītā*, which depicts *kama* (desire) as the primary obstacle in Self-realization. The *Gītā* explains this desire in terms of *rajas*. *Rajas* is the source of activity in nature; it is the creative will that becomes actualized in human desire:

> This (cause of sin) is the great devourer, desire, born from the *guna* called *rajas*. This itself is anger, the great sinner. Know this (desire) to be the enemy here. As a flame is covered over by

> smoke, and a mirror by dirt, as a foetus (in the womb) is enveloped by a bag, so by this (desire) this world (of embodied beings) is enveloped. The knowledge (of the self) of the sentient is enveloped by the eternal enemy, O Arjuna (son of Kunti), which is the form of desire, is difficult to gratify and is insatiable. The senses, the *manas* and the intellect are declared to be its instruments of governance. By these it leads astray the embodied soul after concealing his knowledge.[28]

Māyā is a creative will that has both the powers of projection and concealment. Imaged in the psychic being, it is the creative impetus in human life, but also that which screens one's true divine nature. For it provides the basis of egoic desire, which naturally separates the *jīva*, through the vehicles of the senses, mind and intellect, from its divine source. On the other hand, it is also the basis for mystic teleology, providing the vital energy within which the soul can autonomously realize its potential divinity. For Aurobindo, it is in the submission of this will to the consciousness-force of the Divine Mother that self-transfiguration can occur. Boehme also images the divine will in human nature. Not only does the centre of the human soul correspond to the apophatic Source, but the vital source of human activity is this indeterminable will – a mysterious source of freedom and creative activity. Boehme speaks of the will as originally a morally neutral creative desire that determines itself according to its own imagination. It only becomes substantive and achieves a moral status when it focuses itself on some object of its imagination. In this focusing the indeterminate unground becomes grounded and formed according to the objects of its imagination.

The human predicament occurs because the coalescence of eternal will-consciousness in personal God does not naturally occur in the created temporal realm. Indeed, this is the point of human existence: to purify and transform autonomously one's self-oriented will in the light and grace of divine Wisdom. It is also very interesting to note the important role Boehme ascribes to the Heavenly Virgin (that aspect of Wisdom which gives birth to the Son) in assisting the transformation.[29] This parallels the significance Aurobindo grants to the Mother, in effecting the mystic life. The mystic ideal for Boehme is to effectuate the third and final principle of the Divine Essence. This is the Holy Spirit or

Love, a principle created in the integration of the first and second eternal principles, an ideal which is entailed in the very being of an active and personal Divine. It finds its fulfillment in the creative participation of divinized personal beings in the dynamic life of the Trinity. Boehme exemplifies the theo-monistic ideal I elucidated in Chapters 2 and 3, where the mystic becomes a unique and active medium or effulgence of the personal Divine:

> But the will which has turned round, so that it has been born anew in the divine outflow of love, to that gave he power to become God's child. For it is not the natural, individual will can inherit the divine childship, but only that which, united with the Unity, is one with all things, in which God himself works and wills. Wherein we clearly understand how the inward ground has extroverted itself and made itself visible, and is a peculiar possession of God, as an efflux of divine power and will.[30]

III THE PRACTICAL INTEGRATION

Boehme speaks of the necessity of union with the apophatic source in achieving the ideal of divine creative efflux, or unique human expression of the divine will. This is the practical reconciliation of the apophatic and cataphatic Divine; the theo-monistic process actually mirrors the theogonic theology espoused in these different mystic traditions. To clarify this practical synthesis of the apophatic-cataphatic movement, I begin by examining Karl Rahner's notion of the 'Holy Mystery'. His interpretation of this Source and its relationship to the finite realm provides an illuminating contrast to the theo-monistic interpretation.

Adapted in part from Heidegger's *Dasein*, the Holy Mystery is a depiction of the negative Source beyond positive ascription. To name it would be to objectify and thereby misrepresent it, for it is the grounding both of all objects and the cognitive processes. Rahner sees it as that which 'opens up to unlimited possibilities of encountering this or that particular thing'.[31] The Holy Mystery determines the horizon of human endeavour. It is the illimitable, beyond the reach of positive cognition because it is the Source of these processes. As the over-riding scope of all existent reality, it

cannot be pictured by any particular perspective within the scope. It is the nameless and indefinable ground of all being. Nevertheless, Rahner insists on its personality. This not-something is also not-nothing, to use a phrase of the Chuang Tzu. As the ground of creative horizon of being, this Holy Mystery cannot be construed as 'an absolute empty void'.[32] Rahner is careful to show that this onto-theology (the search for the basis of being) does not reduce to a nihilistic perspective.[33] The encounter is positive and creative. Moreover, human beings cannot but interpret this Holy Mystery as a personal being: the 'finite spirit always experiences itself as having its origin in another and as being given to itself from another'.[34] And finally, as ground and horizon of all existential possibilities, the Holy Mystery is ever immediate to the subject of transcendental experience. One opens oneself, either consciously or not, to the silence of the Holy Mystery, and thereby creatively transcends the limited and conditioned finite. Rahner understands the process as a connatural power of existential self-understanding and creative self-disposal. One becomes a mediating subject of the Holy Mystery in terms of categorical objects, and the apophatic Divine thereby becomes positive, personal and active through historical modes of representation and finite experiences, wherein normally conditioned and limited emotions and attitudes find their grounding, justification, and fulfillment in the movement towards transcendental necessity.[35] In giving itself over through the immediacy of the mediating subject, the Eternal becomes temporal and finite.

So Rahner associates the Divine of apophatic theology to the world in terms of various forms of finite mediation. Krishna Sivaraman recognizes a similar apophatism at work in Hindu theology. He understands Hindu negative theology in terms of positive existentialist encounter. Negation of being has affirmative implications. It is not irrational or nihilistic, but finds its meaning in the understanding of the existential experience it involves. Like Rahner, Sivaraman similarly speaks of 'limit situations' wherein the wholly Other is encountered existentially via the negative way: 'In such "limit situations" existence becomes ship-wrecked, comes to the end of its resources, is reduced to "nothing", when, so to speak, confrontation with "what is" (Being) takes place'.[36] Unlike Rahner, however, Sivaraman's apo-

phatic way emphasises unmeditated experiences of the wholly Other, culminating in the perception of things as they really are, from a divinized perspective. This 'nothing' is not to be misconstrued as nihilistic voidity. The goal is positive; it is a 'revelatory situation by theology where one moves through the awareness of finitude to confrontation with being which Hindu theology calls "God", the "ultimate".'[37] This interpretation of Advaita allows for a transmuted vision of reality as it is in contrast to what it was prior to immersion in this 'God beyond God'. S. P. Banarjee also refers to the positive consequences of this apophatic movement: "The negation/nothing, therefore, is only methodological or transitory leading finally to the establishment of something positive – Brahman.'[38] The existential perceptions preceding the immersion come to be regarded both as not real and not unreal, rather as false appearances in light of the transfused orientation. The finite is taken up in new terms of reference, in the context of the immersion in negative Reality.

So the ontological entailment here in these interpretations of Advaita is much more extreme indeed than that which is espoused in Rahner's religious existentialism, even though Rahner also sees the possibility in mysticism of 'an "immediate" experience, transcending mediation by categorical objects of the everyday . . .'.[39] This is because Rahner perceives religious mysticism as simply a ' "variety" of that experience of the Spirit which is radically offered to every person and every Christian'.[40] The only difference between mediated and non-mediated experiences of the Holy Mystery is in terms of degrees of awareness or repression of a common and already given experience. From a theological standpoint, he says, mystical experience does not constitute 'a "higher" stage of the Christian life in grace' because the Holy Mystery 'is present as innermost sustaining ground (even though unnoticed) in the simple act itself of Christian living in faith, hope, and love.'[41] In contrast, these forms of Advaita perceive a non-mediated experience of the apophatic Real as constituting the religious ideal, one wherein the mystic herself becomes the very medium of the apophatic Divine. The negative means and experience culminates in theo-monism, in the perception of the world as it really and already is, within the light of the ground of all existential possibilities with which the mystic has identified.

Theo-monistic realizations bridge the finite to the infinite wholly Other. At a practical level, the theo-monistic mystic becomes the very link between negative and positive theology.

The same process is at work in some Christian mystic traditions. In recognition of the distinction between apophatic and cataphatic theologies, Louis Dupré points out the practical reconciliation between the finite and the Infinite that occurs in Christian *unio mystica*:

> A purely negative theology would, of course, never result in such a commitment to the finite. Yet in Christianity all unitive mysticism moves beyond a mere denial of the finite. To be sure, the mystic upon entering that union finds the finite incommensurate to God's Being. But as he or she is admitted to participate in that Being the mystic ceases to compare the finite with the infinite. Instead, he or she takes the finite on its own terms and asserts the divine meaning of the finite as it remains within God's own Being. . . . The *unio mystica* restores a divine meaning to the finite that the mystic ignored in the early stage of spiritual ascent and that negative theology permanently ignores.[42]

This process of finite restoration is clearly reflected in the theo-monistic processes espoused by Ruusbroec and Eckhart that I developed in earlier chapters, as well as Boehme's account briefly described earlier in this chapter. This wholly Other, this pure Being, is also identified with the essence of the self or soul; this apophatic essence of active and personal Divine corresponds to the source of the human self. The human being, then, transcends, and thereby bridges, the dark chasm that separates the impersonal Divine from the Divine of cataphatic theology. As Dupré observes, 'To refer to God as the *Being* of the self (Eckhart) or its *super-essence* (Ruusbroec) is to move in a spiritual universe essentially different from that of the first cause or the perfect being which determined the predominant theology.'[43] The predominant theology to which Dupré refers is rational scholasticism. This theo-philosophical method tends to objectify the Infinite, in the sense of focusing solely on it as it is in itself, distinct from the conceptualizing subject, and to define, distance and denigrate finite self over and against this most radical and significant of

'objects'. Ruusbroec and Eckhart redefine the finite in terms of an intimate inter-relationship with the Infinite. They emphasise the transcendent source and nature of the self. As Huston Smith describes it, the mystic access to the 'trans-rational depths of the divine . . . requires that the subject be adequated to its object according to the dictum that "only like can know like".'[44]

The theo-monistic mystic proposes an identity with the inactive, non-dual and impersonal apophatic Divine. In theo-monistic mysticism this Divine is described negatively, according to the externalized conceptions of transcendence so highly refined in rational scholastic thought. Like Rahner's Holy Mystery, this Source is utterly mysterious, and can only find its presence in the world through the denial and overcoming of finite reality – *māyā* or creation conceals the Source. It is only in the transcendence of the finite that one draws the Holy Mystery into the finite, through the categorical objects of interpretation involved in subjective mediation. But theo-monistic mystics emphasise a spiritual component at the very core of finite human nature, one which corresponds in its essence to this negative mystery; they suggest that the Holy Mystery can and ought to be known more intimately than the mediated immediacy of more exoteric religious existentialism. Eckhart says: 'Since it is God's nature that he is unlike anyone, we must of necessity reach the point that we are *nothing*, in that we can be removed into the same essence he himself is.'[45] The realization involved in the revelation of this negative source in the mystic provides a connection between apophatic conceptions and cataphatic theology.

Julius Lipner speaks of the process in the terms of classical *Sāṅkhya*. Preliminary to the transcendent move of identification with the Source is the absorption 'in the profoundest depths of the individual self – the pure *ātman* – to the exclusion of any awareness of anything else. This is a relationless, *en*static rather [than] *ec*static condition.'[46] This experience corresponds to Eckhart's preliminary realization of Self as nothing, a nothing which can then remove the mystic into identity with the divine Essence. Rāmānuja, though a theistic Vedāntin, speaks similarly of the possibility of this experience of essential Self. He says 'the eternal ātman which belongs to a different class from all other entities, is most subtle and forms a unity of its own.'[47] Moreover, since there is an identification of spiritual essence between *ātman* and Brahman, Self-

realization in this context can involve the transcendent move to the apophatic Divine; it enables the mystic to realize the eternal Brahman. Rāmānuja says: 'That man indeed knows the proper form of the ātman, and God will not vanish out of his sight, for God is equal to that form of the ātman.'[48] The essence of the Self of all beings is of the same form of 'unrestricted knowledge [jnāna]' as the essence of God. But realizing this apophatic essence transmutes positively the perception of the theo-monistic mystic. She does not remain passively isolated in the transcendent experience. Rather, she moves out of the contemplative repose, with a perspective colored by the identification with the Divine: 'even at the moment of awaking from yoga – he [the mystic] will always view his equality to God in his own ātmans and in all beings.'[49] The Divine then becomes the centering focus within which the mystic perceives and acts in the world. Herein apophatic theology is practically bridged to cataphatic. The finite, disregarded in the negative praxis, is reaffirmed in the light of the transmuting force of the immersion; and apophatic theology finds its practical reconciliation with the cataphatic.

Returning to Aurobindo's distinction between *kṣara puruṣa* and the *akṣara puruṣa* that I described earlier in this chapter, we find in his writings also mystical experiences that link together these two contrasting modes of Brahman. The ultimate realizations are theo-monistic; the liberated person is one who brings together the *akṣara* (immobile, immutable) with the *kṣara* (mobile, mutable) *puruṣa*:

> The liberated man is he who has exalted himself into the divine nature and according to that divine nature must be his actions. But what is that divine nature? It is not entirely and solely that of the Akshara, the immobile, inactive, impersonal self; for that by itself would lead the liberated man to actionless immobility. It is not characteristic that of the Kshara, the multitudinous, the personal, the Purusha self subjected to Prakriti; for that by itself would lead him back into subjection to his personality and to the lower nature and its qualities. It is the nature of the Purushottama who holds both these together and by his supreme divinity reconciles them in a divine reconciliation which is the highest secret of his being, *rahayam hyetad uttamam*.[50]

Aurobindo sees the natural world and the human will as greatly inhibitive of the mystic life. The mystic can indeed experience cosmic consciousness, the Divine permeating the self and the natural world. But, despite these glimpses into the underlying nature of *prakṛti*, the natural realm is generally inhibitive of, and even actively antagonistic to, mystic transformation. In this respect Aurobindo espouses a very dualistic view; he speaks of various planes of Ignorance (matter, vital and mind) that are grounded in an Inconscience which involves, hides and restrains the underlying *puruṣa*. This is associated with the quality of nature called *tamas* (darkness, obscurity, ignorance), which compounds the concealment produced by the obscuring dynamism of *rajas*. Although Aurobindo proposes a very complex and syncretic Hindu perspective, he essentially agrees with Ruusbroec, Eckhart and Boehme on the adverse affect of the finite upon transcendence processes. Indeed, cosmic consciousness or nature mysticism does not release the *jīvātman* (essential Self or Spirit) from the inconscient grip of matter. The realization of *kṣara puruṣa* is not sufficient for mystic transformation.

Only in overcoming the finite is one able to meet the Divine in a non-mediated way, and most effectively draw it into the natural world. Aurobindo says 'The kinetic side of your nature must first seek to add itself the quietistic; you must uplift yourself beyond this lower nature [*prakṛti*] to that which is above the three Gunas, that which is founded in the highest principle, in the soul.'[51] Immersion in the Source involves realizations of the *jīvātman*, eternal and unchanging, that which stands apart from yet supports the psychic being, which is its finite, individual representative in the material realm. Aurobindo speaks of a psychic transformation preliminary to this immersion, wherein the mystic realizes the psychic centre or soul which 'supports the mind, vital, body, grows by their experiences, carries their nature from life to life'.[52] But, like Eckhart and Ruusbroec, Aurobindo insists that the essence of this individual soul is identified with the negative Source, the *akṣara puruṣa*, and is only realized through a profound negative praxis. He says, 'to lose personality is necessary if we are to gain universality, still more necessary if we are to rise into the Transcendence.'[53] 'The outer nature has to undergo a change of poise, a quieting, a purification and fine mutation of its substance and energy by which the many obstacles in it rarefy, drop away or

otherwise disappear.'[54] This for Aurobindo is the beginning of the spiritual transformation. Here the mystic undergoes monistic realizations of an apophatic nature:

> When there is a complete silence in the being, either a stillness of the whole being or a stillness behind unaffected by surface movements, then we become aware of a Self, a spiritual substance of our being, an existence exceeding even the soul individuality, spreading itself into universality, surpassing all dependence on any natural form or action, extending itself upward into a transcendence of which the limits are not visible.[55]

This discovery of the transcendent *akṣara puruṣa* at the source of psychic self is the awareness of 'a vast formless and featureless impersonality . . . the unchanging Self, the sheer Spirit, the pure bareness of an essential Existence, the formless Infinite and the nameless Absolute'.[56] This merging into the silence of the spiritual Source is a purifying movement, one which can lead to a quietistic stance wherein the mystic withdraws permanently into transcendent liberation. Here the mystic stands as passive witness of the natural realm, withholding all affirmative and meaningful participation in the material world.[57] I will discuss mystic quietism in Chapter 5. However, the theo-monist fulfills the transformation, effectively drawing the experience into the finite. Like the transformative processes exhibited in Christian theo-monism, the Hindu mystic comes not only to reflect the intimations of spiritual reality, but actually becomes by degrees and stages an active medium of this transcendent Source.

The means of this transformation involve more than monistic immersion. Aurobindo associates monistic experiences primarily with powers and experiences of the mind or intellect. But theo-monistic transformation includes also emotional, vital and physical transfiguration. This requires theistic encounters via the emotional heart and the pragmatic will. Love, adoration and devotion to the supreme personal Being leads to an intense, lucid and concrete self-giving which includes the emotions and involves the physical body. Indeed, although at different levels these aspects of human nature might hinder mystic transformation, the goal that some theo-monists have in mind involves the

physical and emotional aspects of human nature. In order to most completely integrate the realizations of monistic immersion into the creative and personalist focus, Aurobindo suggests theistic mysticism: he says, if the mystic 'becomes directly aware of his soul and its dictates [monism], unites his emotional with his psychic personality and changes his life and vital parts by purity, God-ecstasy, the love of God and men and all creatures into a thing of spiritual beauty full of divine light and good, he develops into the saint.'[58] Aurobindo goes on to add to this mystic syncretism the consecration of the individual's will, wherein all the personal and impersonal facets of the individual are wholly opened to the higher divine will or consciousness-force of Śakti. He says 'In the nature there is [then] a more powerful and many-sided change, a spiritual building and self-creation, the appearance of a composite perfection of the saint, the selfless worker and the man of spiritual knowledge.'[59]

So Aurobindo synthesizes theistic and monistic mysticism in terms of his conception of human nature and transformation. The theo-monistic goal is a dynamic affair which bridges apophatic and cataphatic theology. The theo-monistic mystic is the finite vehicle of transcendence; though linked in its essence to the monistic source, the *jīvātman* puts forward its own unique quality in the form of the personal self. Aurobindo refers to it 'as one among many centres of the Universal Being and Consciousness. . . . Essentially one Jiva has the same nature as all – but in manifestation each puts forth its own line of Swabhava [own being or becoming]'.[60] We are reminded here of Boehme's comment that the soul 'is a peculiar possession of God, as an efflux of divine power and will'.[61] In realizing the essential correlation of the *jīvātman* with the apophatic Divine, the theo-monist comes naturally to perceive the world from an enlightened perspective, and to uniquely express the Divine in creative activity. So the theo-monistic processes mirror the modes of the apophatic and cataphatic divine nature, culminating in a vision and participation in a life transfigured by spiritual insights. Relative to other theo-monists, Aurobindo describes generally this liberated perspective in some depth. He says, for instance:

> a knowledge from above begins to descend, frequently, constantly, then uninterruptedly, and to manifest in the mind's

> quietude or silence; intuitions and inspirations, revelations born of a greater sight, a higher truth and wisdom, enter into the being, a luminous intuitive discrimination works which dispels all darkness of understanding or dazzling confusions, puts all in order; a new consciousness begins to form . . . the heart and the sense become subtle, intense, large to embrace all existence, to see God, to feel and hear and touch the Eternal, to make a deeper and closer unity of self and the world in a transcendental realization. Other decisive experiences, other changes of consciousness determine themselves which are corollaries and consequences of this fundamental change. No limit can be fixed to this revolution; for it is in its nature an invasion by the Infinite.[62]

So Aurobindo clarifies the theo-monistic ideal in general terms which give some content to the transformed focus of the mystic and the positive affective power of the experience. The Infinite becomes uniquely manifested in the finite, not only in terms of the enlightened perceptions of the mystic, but also in the mystic's creative activity. Indeed, the ideal is dynamic and personal, and intelligibly and cogently related to processes and activities of human nature. This is the practical reconciliation of apophatic and cataphatic theology, the relation of a transcendent Divine with human beings and the created world. In the theo-monistic movement from static monistic unity and identity to active and personal theistic activity, we see processes which syncretically reflect the philosophical integration of the apophatic and the cataphatic theology. This occurs in terms of a divine will. The two modes of the divine nature, the qualityless, static Source and the personal, creative Divine, can both be experienced mystically, and indeed, are experiences intimately associated together in terms of theo-monistic transformation. These two modes of the Divine are connected by the postulation of a magical and mysterious divine will that arises endlessly out of the divine Source, a creative energy that can also be experienced mystically. The personal Divine is constituted in part by this will, s/he creates by it, and it also provides the dynamic impetus to individual human life and development.

But these various facets are thought to be consititutive of a singular, unified Divine. Indeed, just as the various mystical ex-

periences would appear to focus on particular powers or aspects of singular and unique human beings, be they the emotional, intellectual, vital, or apophatic centres, so there is considered a correspondence of divine powers or aspects that animate the various experiences. The Divine, analogous to the human being, is a unified whole who possesses distinctive modes and powers, each of which can be experienced mystically. Theo-monistic transformation draws these diverse facets syncretically together, thus bridging the Divine apophatic–cataphatic dialectic.

5

The Theo-Monistic Hierarchy

I NUMINOUS, PARANORMAL AND EXTROVERTIVE EXPERIENCES

Although constitutive of extremely diverse theological and philosophical developments, the Christian and Hindu mystic traditions we have examined in the preceding chapters exhibit an experiential typology that stresses an identification with the Divine that is achieved in the transformative processes associated with monistic mysticism. Theistic experiences and activities culminate from the monistic immersion, suggesting that the Divine expresses both impersonal and personal elements, thus bridging the monistic–theistic gap and reconciling apophatic and cataphatic theology. The typology corresponds to John Hick's *personae* and *impersonae* categories of experience interpretation, which we outlined in Chapter 1, but insisting upon an experiential–constructivist epistemology whereby the mystic is actively inspired by a Divine who consists of both elements. The divine *personae* and *impersonae* are not mere conceptual distinctions of human categorization, but are actual aspects of a spiritual *noumenon* which the mystic experiences. Theo-monistic mysticism suggests that the Divine is both impersonal and personal in nature, and that these aspects of the Divine are correlated to monistic and theistic realizations respectively. In this theistic hierarchy, monistic experiences are necessary conditions for the highest theistic realizations, and they are associated with the conception of the Divine. But questions remain surrounding the status of paranormal, nature, and numinous experiences within the theo-monistic hierarchy. How do these phenomena fit into the typology? I will begin with an analysis of numinous experience.

In *Reasons and Faiths*, Ninian Smart proposes two distinctive types of religious experience, the mystical and numinous, and attempts to show how these reflect distinctive theologies, moral emphases, and religious knowledge.[1] Most generally, he depicts mystical experience in terms of monistic mysticism – impersonal, static and non-dual experiences, involving an identity at some level between the subject and the Divine. The numinous experience is quite different. As developed by Rudolf Otto in *The Idea of the Holy*, the numinous experience is the non-rational experience of the Holy, where Holy signifies the isolated 'overplus of meaning' which etymologically precedes it moral and rational connotations.[2] It is characterized only through ideograms, 'analogical notions taken from the natural sphere, illustrating, but incapable of exhaustively rendering, our real meaning'.[3] Ideograms indicate symbolically to the reader experiences of a non-rational reality that affect the subject through non-cognitive feelings. Feelings suggestive of the ineffable Holy are *mysterium*, *tremendum*, *majestas*, and *fascinans*. *Mysterium* denotes the hidden and esoteric, and the astonishment and amazement in the face of a paradoxically aweful yet fascinatingly attractive mysterious wholly other. *Tremendum* signifies the affective power or will of the numinous, the term numinous itself deriving from the Latin *numen*, signifying divine power or will. Otto refers to it in terms of Arthur Schopenhauer's 'daemonic will', where 'daemonic' denotes powerful energy – a supernatural power of the will.[4] Majestas emphasises the creature-consciousness of the subject, the vast separation and distance between the Holy and the person, which makes the Holy an object of worship rather than intimate relation. And *fascinans* denotes the intense attraction to the Holy, despite the awe, fear and dread associated with *mysterium* and *majestas*.

Clearly, numinous experiences differ from mystical experience on two key points: the elements of awesome dread and the distance and radical separation between subject and the Holy. How is numinous experience to fit into a theo-monistic hierarchy? I think it can be drawn into the framework in a number of ways. It might be the early recognition of the source of one's own vital energy. Certainly the awakening to the presence of the *kundalinī* [literally 'serpent power'] in one's self is very startling and awesome, as a strange and incredible power wells up from the intestinal areas and violently uncoils upward through the spinal cord.[5]

Although the energy arises from within the individual, it might appear, at least in the early stages, to derive from a source apart from the subject and to be well beyond the subject's control. I myself can attest to the numinous nature of the experience, the incredible efflux of an awesome energy and power, and the sense of being controlled by an incredible will quite external to my own being, that nevertheless had a strong attractive pull to it. It certainly involved to some degree the elements of *mysterium, majestas, tremendum* and *fascinans.*

Or perhaps the numinous experience might be a mystical realization of an inconscient power or force arising from the apophatic Source, as we developed the view in reference to Aurobindo Ghose and Jacob Boehme in Chapter 4. Some numinous experiences might be the mystic awareness of the creative divine will – a primal creative power. These mystics describe a mysterious fertile energy that arises from the apophatic Source, a creative force which begins as a mysterious inconscient and impersonal form at work behind the creative processes of the natural world, what Aurobindo denotes by *māyā* and Boehme calls primary or ungrounded will. Or this power might take a fragmented personal and primitively self-conscious form such as Boehme's Father of the Trinity. In some Hindu systems we also find this creative will worshipped in the rather amoral form of Śiva, the creative God who is prone in his blind dynamism to unpredictible outbursts of destructive jealousy and anger. Symbolized by the *lingam* (phallus), Aurobindo depicts Śiva as 'the Eternal's Personality of force'.[6] In Chapter 4 we briefly developed Aurobindo's view of the experiences of a variety of powers and personalities representative of the supreme Brahman, Īśvara. Śiva, the lord of *tapas* who expresses the creative-destructive elements of Īśvara, corresponds in many respects to Boehme's Father of the Trinity, which we briefly compared to Aurobindo's Īśvara in terms of the Father-Wisdom–Īśvara-Sakti conjunctions. In itself, the Father is a dark principle and a blind, indeterminate will, which though initiating the process towards divine self-consciousness, is not itself a fully personal, moral Being.[7] Indeed, Boehme speaks of the Father as a wrathful and angry Source, as potentially 'a poisonous or venomous, hostile or enemicitious Thing'.[8] Only in conjunction with the ordinating second principle of the Divine Essence, Wisdom, does this creative principle become fully self-

conscious and moral. As an indeterminate creative principle, which is not wholly personal and moral, the Father, like Śiva, has a tremendously unpredictable nature; he is a God to be worshipped and appeased rather than an object of devotional mystic love.

So some numinous experiences might be realizations of the inconscient energy forces of one's self or of nature, or as a minimally conscious creative will that lacks the positive personal and moral elements of goodness, love and compassion that are present in higher level theistic mystical experiences. In numinous experiences one awakens to cosmic powers that induce awe and dread, and that tend to accentuate the distinction and distance between the subject and the numinous forces. In theo-monistic mysticism, these experiences are considered aspects of conversion experiences. Leonard Angel, for example, interprets numinous experiences as preliminary requisites for higher level mystical experiences. He says 'there is a natural psychological ordering of experience, and a numinous experience must be induced before the mystical experience will take place – the mystical experience intrinsically involves the shattering of the numinous wall, and for that to take place, the numinous wall must be first built up.'[9]

Evelyn Underhill's ordering of phases of mystic progression also locates numinous experiences as preliminary conditions to theo-monistic advancement. Before pursuing intimate relations with spiritual realities one must first recognize their existence and one's relative independence from them. Underhill speaks of the conversion experience in terms of an awakening from instinctive self-centredness, and the recognition of a greater and mysterious power at play both external and internal to the mystic. She says, it 'is a disturbance of the equilibrium of the self, which results in the shifting of the field of consciousness from lower to higher levels, with a consequent removal of the centre of interest from the subject to an object now brought into view: the necessary beginning of any process of transcendence.'[10] These experiences highlight creature-consciousness – the inferior status and inadequacy of the subject in the awakening to an awe-inspiring divine Reality. Although Underhill also includes in conversion experiences feelings of love and rapture, as well as elements of nature mysticism, it is clear that numinous experiences awaken one to aspects of the divine nature, and induce a fascination conducive to theo-monistic advancement. Echoing the theo-monistic ideal, she says: 'a def-

inite and personal relation must be set up between the self and the Absolute Life. To be a spectator of Reality is not enough. The awakened subject is not merely to perceive transcendent life, but to participate therein.'[11] Numinous experiences involve the awareness of supernatural creative forces and energies or of certain minimally personal facets or aspects of the Divine, that awaken the possibilities of theo-monistic advancement. Moreover, as we have illustrated in Chapter 4, the theo-monistic ideal culminates in the overcoming of the dualistic separation present in numinous experiences. The 'daemonic will' is to be integrated positively and personally by the theo-monist, as she becomes a unique channel or expression of the numinous Real. This position will also be illustrated in terms of the Taoist perspective, later in this chapter.

In relation to paranormal phehomena, the theo-monistic ideal is compatible with the possibility of other non-physical realms of existence, inhabited by spiritual beings and energies which can be enountered non-sensorily, whether these realms and beings be interpreted as authentically independent spheres and entities or simply subjective or trans-subjective phenomena of the personal or collective unconscious. Paranormal mysticism – voices, visions, energies, revelatory experiences, prophetic intuitions, possession, mediumship, etc. – can be thought to illustrate realities that can aid or hinder, or have little or no effect, on personal and spiritual transformation. There is speculation in both Hindu and Christian mystical traditions on dangerous or demonic beings or forces, as well as positive spiritual energies, guides, and cosmic and personal guardian angels, which might be experienced mystically. Moreover, there is the speculation on out of body experiences, near-death experiences, and extra sensory perception. These phenomena seem compatible with a mystical typology that hinges on a teleological perspective of personal and spiritual transformation to a dynamic and social divine life. Perhaps there are other realms more appropriate for certain transformative elements, as well as powers of the human being that remain relatively untapped in this realm of existence. Clearly, the fact that the theo-monistic ideal remains at this time so distant from the majority of human beings, requires the postulation of other soul-making realms. Moreover, from a theodical standpoint it requires a doctrine of rebirth, in order to ensure that the ideal of human trans-

formation to the divine life not be defeated by the tremendous dysteleological evils of this particular soul-making plane.[12]

Certain nature mystical experiences seem not unrelated to paranormal phenomena, though the two types of experiences can be clearly distinguished in various ways. In contrast to monistic and theistic introvertive experiences, nature mysticism, like some paranormal experiences, involves some elements of sensory experience. Nature mysticism has been called extrovertive mysticism by W. T. Stace, effectively contrasting an outward experience involving sensory reality from the inward oriented focus of non-sensory experiences of introvertive monists and theists. Leonard Angel provides a most insightful and detailed account of various elements of the extrovertive, nature experience. He says these experiences might include:

> reports of sensory clarity; of a sense of being in touch with the external world; a sense of having had the veil of concepts removed; . . . relatedness; . . . one pointedness; . . . life's meaningfulness; . . . unity of the bodily and mental realms; . . . Reality interfusing the natural order; . . . spontaneity in one's actions; . . . harmony with the natural order; . . . interpretability or significance to all parts of the natural order; . . . security; . . . centredness and rootedness; . . . order; . . . the natural order being transfigured by the bliss of the experiencing subject; . . . emptiness or egolessness . . . which includes preservation of the sensory accompaniments.[13]

Angel contrasts this last element of sensory self-lessness to the non-sensory self-lessness common to introvertive experiences. Interpreted from the theo-monistic perspective, the nature mystic overcomes for the moment her sense of distinctive identity in realization of the essential interconnectedness of all sensible reality. This occurs at some supra-physical level. The sensible world and one's underlying Self is perceived in a non-distinctive fashion, as the subject of the experience somehow coalesces with the object. Theistic mystics tend to interpret this experience as a realization of the divine presence in the natural realm. As mentioned in Chapter 5, both Aurobindo and Bonaventure tell of the possibility of the contemplation of the Divine in the created world, a very powerful consolatory sense of the underlying harmony at

the basis of created things. Eckhart also espouses this experiential possibility, suggesting that the mystic can grasp the way in which creation is essentially *in* God, and God is *in* creation. This is panentheism: as the common Source of this created realm, Eckhart suggests that the Divine permeates all phenomena and provides the interconnecting link that draws the apparent diversity of being together into an harmonious spiritual unity.

The nature mystic overcomes normal categories of perception, in a penetrating vision of the essence of herself and of all phenomena. This can also include a theistic component, as the integrated discernment is extended to include an overriding bond with a pervasive divine Source. Angel points out that this realization is expressed in serene behaviour 'which is informed and transfigured by the exterior signs of serenity, tranquility, and blissfulness'.[14] This is in contrast to theistic and monistic introvertive experiences, where the mystic cuts herself off from the external world through isolating contemplative absorbtion. Angel calls this trance behaviour. But he aptly distinguishes the introvertive trance state from subsequent behaviour, and insightfully observes that most introvertive mystics go on to express extrovertive serenity. He says:

> subsequent to an introvertive mystical experience, the everyday experience and behaviour of the individual is altered in such a way that the individual becomes an extrovertive mystic. Following the standard pattern, then, (and discounting the marginal phenomenon of mystics who remain *all their lives* from a certain point on, in a trance-like state) one might say that all introvertive mystics will also be, or will become extrovertive mystics.[15]

Angel's connection of introvertive trance behaviour to extrovertive serenity has been confirmed in our development of the theo-monistic transformation in the preceding chapters. Indeed, the general characteristics of the theo-monistic mystic include many of the features Angel has described in extrovertive serene behaviour: relatedness, one pointedness, life's meaningfulness, personal unity, a divine power interfusing oneself and the natural world, intuitive spontaneity, harmony of being and purpose, significance of self and the natural world, security, groundedness,

and the perception of a blissfully transfigured natural order. But the key distinctive elements between theo-monistic realizations and extrovertive mysticism appear to be the status of the ego, the depth and duration of serene behaviour, and theistic moral elements.

Like introvertive experiences, the extrovertive realization involves the temporary overcoming of the ego. Unlike introvertive experiences, this ego-loss occurs in an outward focusing of attention wherein the mystic realizes a common point of identification between the underlying Self and the natural world. Although impermanent, the affective power of this outward-oriented trance state is quite pronounced, comprising serene behaviour common to the behavioural consequences of introvertive monistic and theistic realizations. Nevertheless, extrovertive experiences do not involve the transfiguration of the ego that we find in theo-monism, for it is an outward-oriented glimpse of the underlying identity – an unifying awareness in the momentary extinction of the ego – rather than a transformed perspective in ego-transfiguration in Divinity. It is an experience that provides a mystic awareness without permanent transforming effects; it is not integration in the divine impersonal-personal Source, but rather an awareness of or awakening to a hitherto hidden interconnected spirit that pervades one's Self and nature. The objects of apprehension are transfigured in the experience, not the perceiving subject.

So the extrovertive mystic is understood in the theo-monistic frame as experiencing a divine integrating principle, force, power or presence of the self and the external world. The mystic then exudes from the momentary awareness a serene behaviour that reflects the phenomenology of the experience, and that resembles in some respects the behaviour of the theo-monistic mystic who has, more than the extrovertive mystic, internalized the awareness and actually *become* a personal integrating force of the Divine. For the Divine is not simply an integrating principle of creation, but also an impersonal Source and personal Being through which the mystic finds her transformative deification, and which she gradually comes to express individually. While the extrovertive mystic remains an observor of spiritual realities, the introvertive mystic moves on to participate actively and meaningfully in the Divine nature, one which includes also personal, moral elements in the experience.

II MYSTIC QUIETISM AND THE CHRISTIAN SANNYASIN

The question remains regarding the status of those quietistic introvertive mystics Angel mentions, those rare mystics who remain permanently in a trance state. Mystics from both Hindu and Christian traditions attempt to account for the quietism of the mystic path. As I mentioned in Chapters 3 and 4, Julius Lipner distinguishes between solipsistic mysticism, associated with Sāṅkhya Yoga, and sublation monism, associated with Advaita Vedānta. The former is a Self-absorption, wherein the mystic is thought to realize the source or centre of Self, but not to identify with the universal Self. The *ātman* is the impersonal ultimate at the core of the human manifestation; it can be realized without reference to *Brahman*, the universal Self. Herein there is no interpretive identification with a cosmic Source, and no movement to the theistic ideal.

Theo-monism suggests that Lipner's distinction between solipsistic and sublation mysticism is more than interpretive ramification on the part of the mystic. As we will see later in this chapter, Abhishiktānanda associates solipsistic monism with the Advaitin realization of *cit* (consciousness) in *saccidānanda*, while *sat* (existence) constitutes the monistic extension of Self-awareness to universal, transcendent existence. Solipsistic monism is Self-realization; sublation mysticism is a monistic extension of this, wherein the realized Self is open to an essential identification with the universal Self. The theistic component, then, may follow this Self-knowledge and immersion, if the mystic further opens herself up to the possibility of the infusion by the active, personal Divine. Theistic permeation requires the connection of Self with the Source; then the mystic can be open to receive the dynamic energies that continuously arise from this essence of personal God. Indeed, posing the possibility of this kind of hierarchical structure which draws monism and theism together, Lipner asks:

> Could these three Ultimates [the two monisms and theism] of the Spiritual life be linked metaphysically? Could a case be made to show that the monistic impersonal Ultimate is, in fact, an aspect of the theistic personal Ultimate (or vice versa) but not realized as such by the adept of the path in question – that the solipsistic impersonal Ultimate (the *ātman*) derives its very

existence from God without the Yogin being aware of it? Perhaps.[16]

In responding to Lipner's question in the affirmative, R. C. Zaehner associates the Sāṅkhyan experience with Advaitin monistic experience,[17] and interprets it, along with panenhenic (all-in-one-ism or nature) mysticism, as possible stages in a theo-monistic hierarchy. But Zaehner perceives both monistic and nature experiences as possibly dangerous forms of mystic escapism or self-annihilation. In support of his position, he quotes Ruusbroec's concern: 'When a Man possesses this rest in emptiness, and when the impulse of love seems to him to be a hindrance, so in resting he remains within himself, and lives contrary to the first manner which unites man with God; and this is a beginning of all spiritual error.'[18] Zaehner himself depicts this status of monistic realization a bit more metaphorically. He says: 'To rest in this emptiness is dangerous for this is a "house swept and garnished", and though it is possible that God may enter in if the furniture is fair, it is equally likely that the proverbial seven devils will rush in if either the remaining furniture is foul or if there is no furniture at all.'[19]

In *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane* Zaehner is harshly critical of non-theistic mysticism, so much so that his negative appraisal overshadows his penetrating development of a theo-monistic perspective. His explanation of nature mysticism in terms of Jungian psychology of self-integration is highly provocative, and he does begin to fit monistic experience into the theistic perspective. He depicts nature mysticism as a regression into the undifferentiated unconscious, and the rebirth, in a sense, of the conscious ego. This allows for possibility of the unification of the personality through the subsequent integration of the collective unconscious, the personal unconscious and the ego.[20] Monistic mysticism is the next step, wherein the Self detaches from the ego and sensible reality, isolating itself in monistic immersion. Although Zaehner does not postulate an identification with the impersonal elements of the Divine Essence, he does suggest that monistic immersion opens up the possibility of theist deification, where 'the soul is led out of its isolation and is transmuted into the substance of Deity.'[21]

Generally, however, Zaehner speaks negatively of monistic experiences. He is very critical of the apparently anti-social and

amoral implications of certain monistic traditions, and he refers to monistic and theistic mysticisms as 'two distinct and opposed types of mysticism'.[22] But we must keep in mind that he is referring here to the mystic *ideals* and not the *experiences*. He is quite correct to perceive the mystic ideals in radical opposition to each other, as we have shown in Chapter 3. However, although the experiences themselves are distinct, they are in no way opposed to each other. This points to a related issue of Zaehner's comparative study: in his denigration of nature and monistic mysticism, he fails to see and emphasise the *necessary* and exalted position of monistic immersion to the highest theistic realizations. For example, he says that for monists 'Christian mysticism is simply *bhakti* or devotion to a personal god carried to ludicrous extremes whereas for the theist the monist's idea of "liberation" is simply the realization of his immortal soul in separation from God, and is only, as Junayd pointed out, a stage in the path of the beginner. He is still in the bondage of original sin.'[23]

As we have seen in our development of Boehme, Ruusbroec and Eckhart, monistic emptiness is not in Christian mysticism a mere beginner's stage in the theo-monistic transformation, nor a 'simple' Self-illumination of a mystic deeply enmeshed in sin, nor the soul separated from God. Indeed, monism is drawn into the conception of the nature of the Divine, and considered a necessary process of purification that opens up the very possibility of the highest theistic deification. Despite his recognition that 'Emptiness is the prelude to Holiness'[24], Zaehner maintains throughout his book a negative, belittling tone towards monistic mysticism. In his fervour for Christian theism, Zaehner neglects Eckhart's admonishment that we, as mystics, 'pray God to rid us of 'God',[25] and he focuses upon Ruusbroec's warnings against a monistic 'fall', neglecting Ruusbroec's insistence upon the necessity of realizing monistic emptiness *and* unity. Indeed, Zaehner's spiteful tone and emphasis hinder what is otherwise an insightful syncretic development.

Nevertheless, Zaehner's warnings about the perils of some forms of mysticism are echoed by other mystics. Abhishiktānanda (1910–73), a contemporary Christian Sannyasin, speaks of the dangers in egoistically focusing on *kaivalyam* (isolation of being) as an ideal in itself. In this context the mystic subconsciously and consciously creates the quietistic conditions she experiences; she

does not experience the loss of self, but substitutes a controlled self-projection within which the ego solipsistically reposes. He says 'Yet in fact such a super-ego is only an aggrandizement of the *ahamkāra* [ego], a cancerous over-growth of the ego, in which a section of the consciousness has got out of proportion with the rest. This is the source of the diabolic pride of not a few *hathayogīs*.'[26]

No doubt this explains the experiences of many past and present Hindu and Christian mystics. Both theistic and monistic mystics and their commentators stress the dangers of the ego, the unconscious, and the spiritual realm in mystic advancement, perils that are compounded as one progresses along the spiritual path. Donald Evans has referred to the progression as rather like a 'snakes and ladders' movement, where the further along the path you go, the farther you may fall.[27] Sri Aurobindo insists that beyond this physical plane of existence there are subtle-physical beings and subliminal and unconscious energies that can confuse and even mislead the mystic if she is psychically unbalanced or her ego is deflated or inflated. Interpretation of mystical experiences is common to all mysticisms and key to effective theo-monistic advancement and transformation; if mystical experiences are to be intellectually, emotionally and physically assimilated in a positive transformation of consciousness, this requires a balanced and healthy personality, a self-affirming rather than destructive ego, and a morally mature perspective. Otherwise, mystical experiences can become powerful forms of will-aggrandisement, or ego-magnification or gratification, or simply confused and chaotic episodes.[28]

So Zaehner's criticism of monistic mysticism ought not to be construed simply as the dogmatic ravings of a theistic Christian. There is a strong case to be made that non-theistic monistic mystics are in fact anonymous theo-monists – that they are, in Lipner's words, experiencing an aspect of a personal Divine without 'being aware of it'. For one thing, as we developed in Chapter 3, a theo-monistic typology provides a framework of mystical experience which draws the various experiences together consistently and coherently, and grants them an authenticity in terms of the nature of the highest experiences and the Divine. In the theo-monistic framework it can be said that some monistic mystics experience divine aspects of herself and the Real, without recognizing other elements of the divine nature. The same cannot be

said about the theistic experiences in a monistic hierarchy; the encounter of a personal Deity in a monistic hierarchy is not understood as an authentic experience of the monistic Divine. Those mystics who postulate a Divine who is solely impersonal cannot grant theistic experiences a legitimacy and authenticity in terms of the nature of the Divine – there is no reinforcement or affirmation of dynamic and emotionally charged experiences through the higher level static and isolating monistic immersion. Indeed, they are not necessary to the monistic ideal.

Theo-monistic mystics, however, argue that monistic mysticism is necessary to the theistic ideal, and they draw it coherently into the mystic transformation, affirming its authenticity in terms of the nature of the theistic ideal and the theo-monistic Divine. The syncretic power of the theo-monistic frame gives it credibility, in so far as it has an explanatory force absent in other typologies. Within this frame it is suggested that monistic experiences can pose a threat to the mystic, if they are regarded as the highest realizations. Nevertheless, this is not to reject the experiences out of hand. Moreover, theo-monists stress the uniqueness, dynamism and diversity of the deified mystic. Boehme speaks of the enlightened mystic as a 'peculiar possession of God, as an efflux of divine power and will',[29] Aurobindo calls her 'one among many centres of the Universal Being and Consciousness',[30] and Zaehner suggests she is 'a distinct entity though permeated through and through with the divine substance'.[31] Given that the deified mystic becomes a unique expression of an infinite Divine, we cannot pigeonhole the nature and role each theo-monist will take. Not all of them are meant to be political activists, or vigorously compassionate social workers. Perhaps many self-proclaimed, and apparently quietistic, monists do experience the theo-monistic ideal, even though they are not moved in the manner of more socially oriented and active mystics. Even Zaehner himself admits that a monistic mystic can inadvertantly move into theo-monistic realizations. He says: 'It is perfectly possible that the ecstasy experienced by the Yogin or Vedāntin may in some cases be a genuine experience of union with God; for his intention is, in fact, the elimination of sin, or, in psychological parlance, the suppression of the whole contents of the unconscious.'[32] Indeed, in Chapter 2 we suggested that the theo-monistic typology helps us to explain the benevolence of the *jīvanmukta*, the compassion of the

bodhisattva, the wisdom of the Taoist sage – mystics who maintain active moral orientations despite apparently espousing non-theistic ideals.

So, the criteria for determining an authentic theo-monistic movement are very general and inexact. Zaehner speaks of 'a total transformation and sanctification of character'.[33] Aurobindo similarly suggests that the effectiveness of the mystic movement is judged by its integrating force – its ability to harmonize the various facets of the personality (vital, emotional, intellectual).[34] The criteria are helpful only in regard to extreme moral valuations: the actively immoral mystic is to be understood by both thinkers as one who has stumbled at some point on the path, resulting in psychic unbalance and an immoral social orientation. Personality disorders, such as an inflated or deflated ego, or a weakness in moral sensibilities, opens the mystic up to the influence of dark, malevolent spirits, or negative, destructive energies of the unconscious. But mystic quietists are not generally actively immoral. If, though keeping largely to themselves, they do generate spiritual power and moral energies, we should presume that they have found their theo-monistic roles in the principally quietistic stance they maintain. And if they do remain utterly isolated and distanced from human contact and interaction, we should presume that they have achieved monistic liberation but not yet effected a theistic transformation of the personality. They might experience monistic immersion without opening themselves up to the subsequent theistic components necessary to complete the personal transformation.

Such a stance towards monistic mysticism is not open to the same kind of moral critique raised against the actively immoral mystic. Aurobindo, for example, grants this form of mystic quietism a certain qualified legitimacy; although there is nothing wrong with this spiritual realization in itself, it neglects the very natural extension of the experience. He says: 'it becomes possible to realize one's inner being as the silent impersonal self, the witness Purusha. This will lead to a spiritual realization and liberation, but will not necessarily bring about a transformation.'[35] We have already quoted Ruusbroec's reference to the prolonged lingering in monistic emptiness, which fragments the natural theo-monistic progression. But he also insists on the importance of the monistic identification:

> In this delectable unity we shall ever rest, above ourselves and above all things. Out of this unity all gifts flow, natural and supernatural alike. And yet the loving spirit rests in this unity above all gifts. And in this there is nothing but God, and the spirit is united without mean with God.[36]

Meister Eckhart confirms Ruusbroec's perspective, though he speaks of it similarly in Aurobindo's terms of the soul as passive witness. He says: 'When all images [self, angel or God] of the soul are taken away and the soul can see the single one, *then* the pure being of the soul finds passively resting in itself the pure, form-free being of divine unity . . .'[37]

Like Lipner's distinction between solipsistic and sublation monism, Eckhart here seems to be speaking of phases of monism, the realization of Self-isolation, the witness of the unity of the Divine Essence and a movement towards identification with the unity. But throughout the monistic immersion, the experiences are of a static, impersonal unity. Later in the same sermon he comments 'Let your own "being you" sink into and flow away into God's "being God". Then your "you" and God's "his" will become so completely one "my" that you will eternally know with him his changeless existence and his nameless nothing.'[38] Here Eckhart speaks of a subsequent stage of the monistic immersion, where the mystic further flows and sinks into a sense of mutual self-consciousness and self-knowledge – the dawning of personality and activity that issues from the monistic immersion. This movement from monism to personal theistic realization is further developed in other sermons: 'The eye in which I see God is the same eye in which God sees me. My eye and God's eye are one and one seeing and one knowing and one loving.'[39] At this stage the monistic experience of unity moves even further into a theistic personalism, involving the transfigured perception and activity of the deified mystic.

This emphasis upon the stages from impersonal monistic immersion to transmuted personal activity, leads Eckhart to qualify significantly his criticism of quietism. In a sermon, 'When Our Work Becomes a Spiritual Work Working in the World', he does make the following warning: 'Occasionally we might find saints so influenced by God's love, kindness, and mystery that we might reproach them for their belief or some other reason when they

remain bathed in grace and indifferent to good times or bad times.'[40] But he recognizes in the same sermon the sense of progressive stages necessary to the transformation. He comments on the Martha-Mary story in the Gospel of Luke. Here Martha is gently rebuked for her request that Mary refrain from her passive consolatory encounter with Jesus, and help her to serve him. Eckhart interprets this story in a novel way, suggesting that Martha is in fact spiritually more mature than Mary, having personally integrated the inner contemplative life with her outer, active being, while Mary is at an early stage of relative consolatory isolation in theo-monistic transformation. He says:

> Martha was so real that her works did not hinder her. . . . Mary also had to become such a Martha before she would become the mature Mary. For when she sat at our Lord's feet, she was still not the true Mary. Of course, she was so according to her name but not yet in her being. For she sat still in a feeling of pleasure and sweetness, was received into the school, and learned how to live. . . . Her name was not Mary when she sat at Christ's feet. I rather call Mary a well-practiced body when she is obedient to wise instruction. Also, I call obedience when the will is sufficient for what our insight commands.[41]

For Eckhart, this theo-monistic reading of the Martha and Mary story explains Jesus' gentle response to Martha's request, one which meant 'Be reassured, Martha, she has chosen the better part, which will lose itself in her. The highest thing that can happen to a creature will happen to her. She will be as happy as you.'[42]

The idea of theo-monistic progression permeates Eckhart's writings, and acts to temper his critique of mystic quietism. There are stages where monistic isolation is necessary to the path, as well as powerful moments of introvertive theistic consolation. Although the theo-monistic frame provides an account of these quietistic phases, it does not provide precise criteria for determining the point at which they become a hindrance to the spiritual advancement. One must not be too quick or harsh in judgement against the mysticism of another person, given the progressive developmental stages and the facts that the ideal here involves such a dynamism and individual diversity, and that there are

many apparently anonymous theo-monists. Indeed, most mystics are not overly concerned about precise and refined experiential typologies or with exclusivist theological dogma; for the most part, they are not obsessed, like scholars of religion, with understanding and clarifying the formal processes and philosophies, nor in depicting these as the absolute truth, over and against those of another tradition. Many mystics exhibit a theo-monistic orientation, without ever explicitly reconciling their experiences and subsequent orientations with the formal beliefs and practices of their tradition.

There is no doubt, however, that doctrinal theology significantly effects the mystical experiences open to the mystic. The experiential–constructivist epistemology of theo-monism developed in Chapter 1 proposes a dynamic interaction between categories of experiences and spiritual realities, suggesting that mystics are involved in an ongoing conceptual development and spiritual learning. Categories and concepts of interpretation are in part dependent upon symbolic theology and mystic practices; mystic theology and practice influences very much the kinds of experiences the mystic will have.

There is a danger, then, that a mystic who has become firmly entrenched in solely apophatic theology and negative praxis, and successfully overcome categories of interpretation, will get stuck in the monistic phase of theo-monism. Abhishiktānanda, for example, recognizes the importance of both apophatic and cataphatic theology in theo-monistic mysticism. A Benedictine priest, he established Saccidānanda Ashram, Shāntivanam, at Kulittalai, with Jules Moncharin in 1950. There he integrated aspects of Hindu *sannyāsa* (renunciation), including scriptures and practice, with Christian spirituality. He became a disciple of Sri Rāmana Mahārshi and, later, Sri Grānānanda, and focussed heavily upon the *Upaniṣads* in his synthesis of Hindu apophatic spirituality with Christian theology of the Trinity. He himself then 'became an intellectual leader and a guru among a significant minority of Catholics who favoured drawing out the source of Hindu spirituality for a renewed expression of Christianity.'[43]

In this synthetic renewal, Abhishiktānanda focuses upon the Advaita Vedāntic doctrine of *saccidānanda*. He perceives in this speculative theology a reflection of an impersonal, inactive and non-dual aspect of the Self and the Divine, elements which must

be uncovered in order to realize the highest theistic transformation. This Advaitic theology reflects closely the apophatic speculation of Ruusbroec and Eckhart, and Abhishiktānanda considers it to express naturally the monistic experiences of Western spiritualists, who have not always found an effective theological symbol system by which to express the experience. He says: 'If only they had been familiar with Vedantic thought, they would have expressed themselves quite naturally in advaitic language.'[44]

Sat (existence) denotes the experience of consciousness-purity, a realization of identity at the core of the Self and the Divine. He writes: 'When my consciousness is pure enough to give a perfect reflection, then pure being, *sat* mysteriously and inexorably reveals itself to me, but it also takes me into its own simplicity and absoluteness. It makes me realize that my very being and existence is nothing other than its own being and existence.'[45] *Sat* is the unified essence of all existence, that point where the mystic finds her common identification with a pure being which, although immanent, is also transcendent, and although a cognitive emptiness, is also an ontic fullness.

Cit (consciousness) denotes the awareness of *sat*, the static and silent, self-isolated *puruṣa* that solipsistically witnesses itself in this groundless and objectless identification in unity. Abhishiktānanda says: 'In the mirror of pure awareness of myself I discover the mystery of *cit* in itself, that is the non-reflexive presence of the self to itself, the light that depends on no source, but shines with its own radiance and by its shining makes all things luminous.'[46] Such is an objectless reflection of the core of Self upon itself, where the unity of *cit* comes to know itself in radical self-isolation, at 'the source and point of emergence of all consciousness'.[47]

Ānanda is the affective power of the immersion in transcendent pure being and the awareness of non-reflexive self-consciousness. It involves the extinction of all temporal fears and anxieties in 'an inexpressive sense of completion, peace, joy and fullness'.[48] In this transfixion in primary Being, there are no desires to be appeased – no wants to be fulfilled. This is not a matter of a temporal and mutable 'having' of bliss, but rather, like the experiences of *sat* and *cit*, it is a non-dualistic being in a timeless and unchanging bliss, which resides at the source of one's being. Abhishiktānanda says: 'When I awake to the Real in the depth of my self-awareness,

all limits, all death, time itself, are forever transcended. I am forever established in my own centre, in the very centre of all things, in the *ānanda* of *cit* and *sat*, in the perfect bliss of Being and Being's awareness of itself.'[49]

Effectively combined with *dhyana* yoga, the negative theology of *saccidānanda* leads to the detachment of epistemological categories which open up the possibility of Self-transparency in the Source. This Abhishiktānanda deems necessary to theo-monistic advancement. But in and of itself, this Advaitic speculative theology only symbolizes part of the experiential transformative picture. The *jñānī* requires a positive and personal theology to aid her in the development of categories conducive to theo-monistic realizations. The monistic immersion finds its practical and personal integration only in cataphatic theology and theistic meditation. Abhishiktānanda writes: 'Only when he emerges from his advaitic expression at once of being and of nothingness, can the *jñānī* realize that he is born of God. But before going further he must plunge – or rather be plunged by the Spirit – deep within this experience of Sonship, the very experience of the only Son, the eternal and unique Word.'[50]

Abhishiktānanda merges together Christian Trinitarian theology and Advaitic apophatic theology. He says:

> The experience of Saccidānanda carries the soul beyond all merely intellectual knowledge to her very centre, to the source of her being. Only there is she able to hear the Word which reveals within the undivided unity and advaita of Saccidānanda the mystery of the Three divine Persons: in *sat*, the Father, the absolute Beginning and Source of being; in *cit*, the Son, the divine Word, the Father's Self-knowledge; in *ānanda*, the Spirit of love, Fullness and Bliss without end.[51]

Abhishiktānanda depicts the positive and personal aspects of theomonistic transformation in terms of an opening to and receiving of the power of the Son, the creative Word. The Father is correlated to *sat* – simple, primary Being and the source of all being. The self-awakening to Being in the monistic immersion becomes personal and positive, as the identity in eternity with the static and silent Abyss makes its movement towards time through the very self-awareness of *sat* in *cit*. Herein the quietist mystic identi-

fies with the Father's consciousness of Himself. He becomes transfused in *cit*, the Son and Word, and in this transfiguration comes to realize his theo-monistic nature and role as unique expression of the Father: 'Being indeed in his [the mystic's] deepest self the image of God, he recognizes himself in the perfect reflection of the Father's glory which the Son is.'[52]

This positive and personal realization ties the mystic profoundly to humankind, for all are intimately linked at the Source of all being, and are creatively united through the Trinity: 'There is no man with whom I do not have communion in the mysterious circumsession (mutual penetration) and circuminsession (coinherence) which is characteristic of the one undivided life of the Holy Trinity.'[53] *Ānanda* or Spirit plays a dynamic role in the transformation. In its monistic form, it is an impersonal and affective power of the internal manifestations of *sat* and *cit*. But it also awakens one to the transfiguring Son, for he actually 'is that serenity, that fullness, that bliss, which invades the whole being of him in whom the great Silence [*sat*] has begun to dwell'.[54] *Ānanda* thus becomes an active and personal medium which stimulates the awareness of the creative dynamism of the Son; for the Self-awareness of *sat*, is also a creative power, which not only reveals the Father, but also manifests the Father through the Spirit. So in this Christian reading of the theo-monistic transformation the monistic immersion becomes penetrated by dynamic and personal elements, as the Holy Spirit leads the voided monist to the internal permeation by the creative and personal Son, who transfigures the mystic in terms of the elements arising in the cosmogonic processes. The mystic then comes to be possessed by the positive and personal aspects of *ānanda* – she comes to exude the Spirit from the core of her very being: 'The inmost centre of the soul seems to open itself up from within, making itself a channel through which rushes the same infinite force which bears the universe itself to its consummation and perfection in the Parousia.'[55]

III RELIGIOUS EXCLUSIVISM, TAOISM AND BUDDHISM

So Abhishiktānanda provides a profound Christian adaptation of Advaitic doctrine and practice, illustrating a form of theo-monism

as it is actually being practiced in a pluralistic context. The theo-monistic transformation requires both apophatic and cataphatic speculative theologies and meditative practices. But the theo-monistic frame is open to a very wide variety of specific theologies and practices. Indeed, there is nothing about the transformative processes and the conception of the Divine in theo-monism that would tend to prop up one particular religious tradition over others. Although R. C. Zaehner, and even Abhishiktānanda, for example, would appear to maintain the ultimate truth and essential importance of the Roman Catholic Church and dogma to the theo-monistic ideal, there is nothing inherent to the frame and ideal which would justify the view. Claims of a practical or theological superiority or fulfillment, or an essential administrative hierarchy, require an appeal to grounds or evidence external to the theo-monistic frame and ideal. Nevertheless, it seems clear that some religious traditions espouse doctrine and practices which are much more conducive to the theo-monistic ideal than others. Moreover, an overemphasis on non-theistic doctrine and practice would appear even to inhibit the actualization of the ideal. A theo-monistic frame does entail a theistic hierarchy; it maintains a theistically exclusivist typology.

No doubt the idea of a theistic hierarchy troubles many believers involved in what are traditionally understood to be non-theistic traditions. But in so far as these believers do espouse a theo-monistic ideal, the hierarchy implies a theistic Divine, as we clarified the distinctive experiences in Chapter 2. The problem is that the term 'theistic' is normally associated with popular theisms that tend to anthropomorphise and objectify the Divine. But the theo-monistic Divine is not for a moment to be construed as a 'big guy in the sky' – as a distinctive and transcendent 'object' of fear, coercive submission and heavenly reward. Indeed, the theists I have examined throughout the book definitely do not objectify the Divine in this manner. The Divine, though ultimately a unique and androgynous, personal Being, is intimately linked to human beings both monistically and in a dynamically personal and moral fashion. The Divine is both non-dualistic and differentiated, static and active, impersonal and personal; and all of these elements correspond in finite respects to human beings, who are thought to be potential autonomous participants in a creative and communal divine life. Thus is the theo-monistic framework that is exempli-

fied by the Hindu and Christian mystics I compared in previous chapters.

But it appears that the theo-monistic hierarchy is not exclusive to certain Hindu and Christian mystic traditions, nor to theistic systems. Without going into detail, it is important to illustrate theo-monism in other major non-theistic traditions. The *Chuang Tzu*, for example, writes of the 'daemonic man', the Taoist sage who uniquely exemplifies the divine power of the Tao. Here we have an obviously mystical integration of the numinous experience. A. C. Graham comments that for Chuang Tzu, 'One of his names for the highest kind of man is the "daemonic man", and he thinks of man as lifted above himself by the infusion of the daemonic from outside when the heart is cleared of all accretions of past knowledge.'[56] 'Daemonic' is Graham's translation of *shen*, which is used to describe the person who through purification is open to receive the *ch'i* (power or energy) of the Tao. 'Daemonic' comes from Goethe's and R. Otto's use of the term. But, Graham warns, the 'restless, anguished quality' of 'daemonic' 'is foreign to the Chinese word'.[57]

Graham's reading of the *Chuang-Tzu* corresponds very closely indeed to the transformative processes that I have developed in the context of theo-monistic experiences. The *Chuang Tzu* contains a number of passages that exemplify the theo-monistic transformation. Graham's comments on one of them illustrate vividly the Taoist parallel:

> when the purified fluid has become perfectly tenuous the heart will be emptied of conceptual knowledge, the channels of the senses will be cleared, and he will simply perceive and respond. Then the self dissolves, energies strange to him and higher than his own (the 'daemonic') enter from outside, the agent of his actions is no longer the man but heaven working through him, yet paradoxically . . . in discovering a deeper self he becomes for the first time truly the agent. He no longer has deliberate goals, the 'about to be' at the centre of him belongs to the transforming processes of heaven and earth. Then he will have the instinct for when to speak and when to be silent, and will say the right thing as naturally as a bird sings.[58]

Like the Christian and Hindu mystic traditions we have exam-

ined, the *Chuang Tzu* speaks of a self-lessness that is necessary to the transformative ideal. The individual egoic goals are substituted by higher powers channelled through the revitalized agent, whose life then uniquely expresses the power and wisdom of the Source of all existence.

Also, like Karl Rahner's Holy Mystery and the apophatism that Krishna Sivarman perceives in Hindu theology (Chapter 4), the Tao is depicted by Chuang Tzu as the negative source behind all positive ascription. Graham says that Chuang Tzu 'generally seems to put the Way beyond the dichotomy of something and nothing, as both "without anything" and "without nothing" '.[59] This Tao is both not-something and not-nothing. It is wholly other than sensible phenomena, yet as source of phenomenal reality, it is not an empty void. Moroever, it is neither solely impersonal nor personal. Indeed, the *Chuang Tzu* would seem also to espouse a personal-impersonal dialectic not wholly unlike that which we developed in Chapter 4. Graham comments:

> It is clear that Chuang-Tzu does not in any simple sense believe in a personal God, but he does think of heaven and the Way as transcending the distinction between personal and impersonal (which would be as unreal to him as other dichotomies), and of awe as though for a person as an appropriate attitude to the unscrutable forces wiser than ourselves, throughout the cosmos and in the depths of our own hearts, which he calls 'daemonic'.[60]

Futher examination of Taoist mysticism is required to draw it more cogently into the theo-monistic system. But it is clear from this brief outline that it involves theo-monistic elements. Certain Buddhist mysticisms also appear to exhibit aspects of the theo-monistic frame. Within various Buddhist schools we of course find the traditional emphasis upon the compassionate *bodhisattva*, a theistic element which is sometimes associated with schools that do not espouse a theistic ideal. As I argued in Chapter 2, active compassion is an orientation quite alien to the actual state of monistic immersion; the *bodhisattva* exemplifies elements which can only be coherently related to personal elements of a theistic Divine. But more specifically, Roger Corless writes of two varieties of Buddhist mysticism which might, I think, be understood as

streams of both monistic and theo-monistic mysticism. Corless distinguishes these in terms of a mysticism of darkness and a mysticism of light.

Deriving from the sanskrit word *apoha* (taking away), Corless labels Buddhist mysticism of darkness, 'apohic'.[61] It is interesting that the etymology of apohic correlates so closely to that of apophatism, which derives from the Greek 'apo' (removal) and 'phasis' (appearance or light). In Mādhyamika, *apoha* is the dialectical method of taking away a philosophical position through illustrating its inconsistency, thereby illuminating *śūnyatā* (emptiness). Corless argues that this approach of apohic mysticism is also found in various forms in Zen and Theravāda. In these cases, the emptiness experienced is not described: 'Nothing, however, is said about *śūnyatā*. It is simply allowed to present itself.'[62] Presumably Corless is interpretating emptiness here linguistically rather than substantially, in the same way that Christian mystics interpret Godhead and Hindu mystics interpret *nirguṇa* Brahman. It does not designate a literal nothingness, but rather means, as Leonard Angel puts it, 'that no predicates apply to it'.[63]

In contrast to apohic mysticism, Corless refers to the Buddhist mysticism of light as 'alamkaric', which derives from the Sanskrit *alamkāra* (ornament). He sees this mysticism exemplified in Yogācāra, Vajrayāna, and Hua Yin. Here the the experience somehow includes or embraces all of reality rather than excluding everything, as the mystic comes to regard the world in a vision transformed by the experience of *śūnyatā*. It bears theistic aspects absent in the negative and unqualified liberation of apohic mysticism. Corless says, 'In this system, Emptiness is *spoken of* and it is described as full, brilliant, sparkling. This is the universe as seen by Vajrayāna; the world as a *maṇḍala* of a deity; *saṃsāra*, viewed from what Vajrayāna calls "pure perspective", as nirvana'.[64]

The correlation of these two types of Buddhist mysticism with the theo-monistic typology is striking indeed. Apohic mysticism is a radical stripping away of all that interferes with an experience of a Reality that wholly differs from everything we might see or know. Apohic mysticism would appear to correlate with Hindu and Christian apophatic mysticism, as I clarified it in Chapters 2 and 4. Alamkaric mysticism involves dynamic and personal elements that the mystic expresses from a 'pure perspective', following her immersion in the Real. These correspond to theo-monistic

experiences. Moreover, Corless insists that these two mysticisms are both 'skillful means for the demonstration of Emptiness',[65] thus implying that Emptiness involves both the impersonal-personal and static-active elements we have developed in the theo-monistic frame. Although Corless does not explicitly connect the two together in terms of a spiritual progression, he does point out that in Central Asian Mahayana both types of mysticism are drawn into the Buddhist system, and in Far Eastern Mahayana they are actually synthesized together.

So we find in a Taoist tradition and in certain Buddhist contexts intimations of theo-monistic mysticism. The theo-monistic hierarchy seems not to be exclusive to the Hindu and Christian mystic traditions I have compared in this book. I suggest that the typology provides a framework which has very positive implications for contemporary pluralistic concerns. While recognizing and maintaining the numerous differences between attitudes, practices and beliefs, theo-monism nevertheless proposes a common experiential core at the heart of various religious traditions. It suggests a hierarchy which cogently accounts for a variety of religious experiences in terms of higher level theistic realizations and the nature of the Divine. This hierarchy gives a significance and authenticity to various religious experiences found in many different traditions, and it maintains the power and legitimacy of a very wide variety of theological symbolism and religious practice. Despite the diversity of experiences and theology, the typology supports in a qualified sense Huston Smith's primordialist perspective on religion. He writes:

> Ontologically, the primordialist claims that we are bound to the ultimate so completely that in the end it is difficult if not impossible to differentiate us from it. Epistemologically, he claims that we can know our divine identity. Historically, he claims that the first two claims constitute the core of the Revelation that has spawned and powered the world's enduring religions.[66]

Ontologically, theo-monism suggests that there are various spiritual realities and different facets and forms of a personal Divine to which the human being can be conformed in religious

experience. This includes a monistic immersion in and identification with this Divine. This is a static, non-dual and impersonal state, wherein the Divine unites with the mystic at a primary level of being. But it is natural and necessary that the mystic undergo a theistic return to an active and individual differentiation which reflects various elements of the personal Divine. Epistemologically, these experiences affect the mystic's consciousness in positive and meaningful ways. This is the common claim of the Hindu and Christian theo-monistic mystics I have examined: at the core of various religious revelation is the imperative to become a unique and individual expression of a creative and personal Divine.

Notes

1 Constructivist Epistemologies of Mysticism: a Critique and a Revision

1 Steven Katz, 'The "Conservative" Character of Mysticism', in S. Katz, (ed.), *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 40. The constructivist position is also called the 'cultural–linguistic' approach. As George Lindbeck describes it: 'Inner experiences are not prior to their linguistic exteriorization; rather, the symbol system is the precondition of the experiences – a sort of cultural, public a priori for the possibility of "private" experience.' From *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1984) as quoted by Huston Smith in 'Philosophy, Theology, and the Primordial Claim', *God, The Self, and Nothingness: Reflections Eastern and Western*, Robert E. Carter (ed.) (New York: Paragon House, 1990) p. 10.

I would also include Wayne Proudfoot's view under this general constructivist umbrella. See his *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). Proudfoot argues that all religious feelings or emotions are subsumed within the cognitive frame wound up in explanatory judgements. G. William Barnard also suggests that 'Proudfoot's thesis is simply an extention and refinement of Katz' conceptions, not a radical break.' See Barnard's 'Explaining the Unexplainable: Wayne Proudfoot's *Religious Experience, Journal of the American Academy of Religion*', vol. 60 (1992) pp. 231–56. In this article Barnard criticizes the psychological foundations which underly Proudfoot's view, and develops some criticisms which are similar to those that I raise in this chapter, especially in reference to Sallie B. King, 'Two Epistemological Models for the Interpretation of Mysticism', *Journal Of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 56 (1988) pp. 257–93.

2 Influential proponents of the essentialist view include Ninian Smart (see especially 'Interpretation and Mystical Experience', *Religious Studies*, vol. 1 (1965) pp. 75–87), Evelyn Underhill (*Mysticism*, (New York: New American Library, 1974), and Aldous Huxley (*The Perennial Philosophy*, (New York: Harper, 1945).

3 See, for example, Peter Moore, 'Mystical Experience, Mystical Doctrine, and Mystical Technique', in Steven Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (London: Sheldon Press, 1978); Robert Gimello, 'Mysticism and Its Contexts', in Steven Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*; Robert K. C. Forman, 'Eckhart, *Gezucken*, and the Ground of the Soul', *Studia Mystica*, vol. 11, no. 2 (summer, 1988); Deirdre Green, 'Unity in Diversity', *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 3, 1 (spring 1982); and Donald Evans, 'Can Philo-

sophers Limit What Mystics Can Do? A Critique of Steven Katz', *Religious Studies*, vol. 25, no. 3 (1989).

4 John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (London: Macmillan Press, 1989). All references to this book will be included in brackets in the text body.

5 Donald Evans, 'Can Philosophers Limit What Mystics Can Do? A Critique of Steven Katz', p. 54.

6 It should be noted that the constructivist can still argue that heresy is a consequence of the mystic's psychological and socio-religious backgrounds. Although I agree that heresy can in some cases arise in part from the mystic's own personal history and choices, I doubt very much that it is the sole contributing factor in every instance of mystic heresy. For example, critics of Meister Eckhart might argue that Eckhart's heretical-sounding claims were a result solely of his personal hubris and his reading of rather unorthodox theology, but such accounts seem unjustified given Eckhart's moral background and teachings and his Dominican education. More likely, something about his mystical experiences played a large role in his unorthodox mystic theology.

7 Terence Penelhum brought this point to my attention.

8 Caroline Franks Davis, *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) p. 165. See especially chapter VI, where Franks Davis proposes a theory of concept formation which combines the association and hypothesis-testing theories.

9 Donald Evans suggested this 'experiential–constructivist' label to me.

10 For a good development of the experience of consciousness-purity, as well as a variety of strong responses to the constructivist position that there can be no experiences of conscious-purity, see Robert K. C. Forman (ed.), *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). Dr Forman's comments on an earlier version of this chapter helped me to place this experience in the experiential–constructivist typology.

11 I realize that a non-constructivist psychology of mysticism might be proposed here, reducing this epistemological scheme of spiritual realities interacting with psychic structures to that of trans-subjectively common unconscious phenomena impinging upon psychic structures, which are not over-determined by socio-historical influences. But I think that mystic accounts and effects of certain experiences speak strongly against a psychologically reductionist claim of the purely-human origin of all mystical experience.

12 Louis Dupré, 'The Christian Experience of Mystical Union', *Journal of Religion*, vol. 69, no. 1 (January 1989) pp. 9 and 10.

2 Introvertive Mystical Experiences

1 Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (New York: New American Library, 1974) especially pp. 95 and 418–19.

2 W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1961).
3 R. C. Zaehner, *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), and Ninian Smart, 'Interpretation and Mystical Experience', *Religious Studies*, vol. 1, (1965) pp. 75–87.
4 L. Philip Barnes, 'Introvertive Mystical Experience', *The Scottish Journal of Religious Studies*; vol. 11, no. 1 (spring 1990) pp. 5–17, and Caroline Franks Davis, *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) esp. p. 178.
5 See Ninian Smart, 'Interpretation and Mystical Experience', especially p. 83.
6 See Ninian Smart, *Reasons and Faiths* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958) pp. 132–147, and 'The Purification of Consciousness and the Negative Path', in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, Steven Katz (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) especially p. 117.
7 Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, pp. 95–7. Stace's emphases.
8 Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, pp. 98 and 99. Stace's emphases.
9 Meister Eckhart, *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in new Translation*, Matthew Fox (ed. and comm.) (New York: Doubleday, 1980) p. 328.
10 Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, pp. 95–6.
11 Fox, *Breakthrough*, p. 76.
12 Fox, *Breakthrough*, p. 77.
13 This is not an uncommon move by essentialist scholars. For example, L. Philip Barnes refers to an obviously monistic description given by Gregory of Nyssa. But this shows only that Gregory had monistic experiences; not that theistic mystical experience is in fact monistic. See 'Introvertive Mystical Experience', p. 13.
14 Jan Van Ruysbroek, *The Spiritual Espousals*, Eric Colledge (tr.) (New York: Harper & Row, 1953) pp. 101–2.
15 Ruysbroek, *The Spiritual Espousals*, bk II, pts 2–3.
16 Fox, *Breakthrough*, pp. 92–3.
17 Fox, *Breakthrough*, p. 375.
18 I agree with Donald Evans that mystics should have the final say on these issues. It is important to take Ruusbroec's and Eckhart's insistence on these two types very seriously. See Donald Evans, 'Can Philosophers Limit What Mystics Can Do?', *Religious Studies*, vol. 25, no. 3 (1989) pp. 53–60. His essay very much influenced my thinking in this chapter.
19 Fox, *Breakthrough*, pp. 304–5.
20 Fox, *Breakthrough*, p. 395.
21 As quoted by Robert K. C. Forman in 'Eckhart, *Gezucken*, and the Ground of the Soul', *The Problem of Pure Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) p. 111. In this essay Forman associates Eckhart's use of the term *Gezucken* (enraptured) with the monistic pure-consciousness experience, and he illustrates the non-relational and non-intentional structures of Eckhart's descriptions of these events. Forman speaks of this monistic experience of pure consciousness as 'but only a milepost' along Eckhart's mystic path

(p. 115). However, as we will see, this pure consciousness event is a *necessary condition* of the mystic ideal Eckhart has in mind.

22 Fox, *Breakthrough*, p. 93.

23 In 'Three Categories of Nothingness in Eckhart', *Journal of Religion*, vol. 72 (spring 1992), pp. 248–68, Beverly J. Lanzetta supports the theo-monistic interpretation of Eckhart's theology. She writes, for example (p. 262), 'The utter emptiness of the soul, and its radical detachment from all created things, create a place in which God must work and in which the birth of the Son occurs. . . . Yet, the self-emptying of the soul is not finalized in the stillness and indistinction of the Godhead but flows out again bearing gifts of a "wife" and gives birth to the self-same Son in the ground or the "spark" of the soul. For Eckhart, the resurrected or new existence takes place in *this life* when the soul as virginal wife lives out of its own ground'.

24 Fox, *Breakthrough*, p. 169.

25 Ruysbroek, *The Spiritual Espousals*, p. 147.

26 Ruysbroek, *The Spiritual Espousals*, p. 158.
In 'The Christian Experience of Mystical Union', *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 59, no. 1 (January 1989) pp. 9–10, Louis Dupré comments on Ruusbroec's Christian interpretation of the theo-monistic process: 'Yet in this blissful union the soul comes to share the dynamics of God's inner life, a life not only of rest and darkness, but also of creative activity and light. The contemplative admitted to this union is granted to see by the light in which God sees Himself and to follow the outflowing movement of the Godhead. He participates in the eternal Word as it proceeds from the divine Silence, containing all creation within itself. Union with God, then, for Ruusbroec, means union with God's self-expression – the internal one of the Word as well as the external one of creation.' Also in this paper Dupré proposes an epistemological account of this transformative experience as it pertains to Christian *mystica unio*.

27 Fox *Breakthrough*, pp. 319–20.

28 Fox, *Breakthrough*, p. 148, my emphasis.

29 Ruysbroek, *The Spiritual Espousals*, p. 136. Also, see especially pp. 163, and 165–6.

30 Fox, *Breakthrough*, p. 282.

31 Fox, *Breakthrough*, p. 441.

32 See especially Michael von Brück's recent book, *The Unity of Reality: God, God-Experience, and Meditation in the Hindu-Christian Dialogue*, James V. Zeitz (tr.) (New York: Paulist Press, 1991). He illustrates some parallels between the Advaitic non-duality experience and the apophatic experience of the Christian Trinity, in terms that correspond in some respects to theo-monism.

33 Donald Evans, 'Can Philosophers Limit What Mystics Can Do?', pp. 57–8.

34 Louis Dupré, 'The Christian Experience of Mystical Union', p. 5.

3 Monistic and Theistic Hierarchies

1 A. J. Alston, 'Śaṁkara on the Absolute', in *A Śaṁkara Source-book*, vol. 1 (London: Shanti Sadan, 1981) p. 63.
2 Śaṅkara, *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadeśasāhasrī of Śaṅkara*, Sengaku Mayeda (tr. and ed.) (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1992), pt 1, ch. 6, para. 3 and pt 1, ch. 17, para. 20; pp. 116, 162.
3 See Mayeda's introduction to Śaṅkara's *A Thousand Teachings*, pp. 25, 78–79.
4 Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (tr. and comm.) *The Brahma Sūtra* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968) p. 34.
5 Radhakrishnan, *The Brahma Sūtra*, p. 32.
6 T. R. V. Murti, 'The Two Definitions of Brahman in the Advaita', in Harold Coward (ed.), *Studies in Indian Thought: Collected Papers of Professor T. R. V. Murti* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988) p. 78.
7 Swami Nikhilananda, *Self-Knowledge of Sri Sankaracharya* (Mylapore, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1970) p. 66.
8 See for example Nikhilananda, *Self-Knowledge*, pp. 64–5, and Mayeda in Śaṅkara, *A Thousand Teachings*, p. 78.
9 Śaṅkara, *A Thousand Teachings*, pt 3, ch. 3, para. 112; p. 251.
10 Śaṅkara, *A Thousand Teachings*, pt 1, ch. 11, para. 5, p. 126.
11 Nikhilananda, *Self-Knowledge*, p. 129.
12 Nikhilananda, *Self-Knowledge*, p. 139.
13 Śaṅkara, *Vedānta Sūtras*, in George Thibault (tr.) in F. Max Müller (ed.), *The Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 34 (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973) pt 1, ch. 1, para. 4.; pp. 32–3.
14 Murti, 'The Two Definitions of Brahman in the Advaita', p. 72.
15 Alston, *Śaṁkara on the Absolute*, p. 124.
16 Śaṅkara, *Vedānta Sūtras*, pt 1, ch. 1, para. 4; p. 26.
17 Śaṅkara, *Vedānta Sūtras*, pt 1, ch. 3, para. 28; p. 203. and pt 2, ch. 1, para. 11; p. 317.
18 Nikhilananda, *Self-Knowledge*, pp. 7–8.
19 Śaṅkara, *A Thousand Teachings*, pt 1, ch. 17, para. 9; p. 161.
20 Harold Coward, 'A Hindu Response to Derrida's View of Negative Theology', Harold Coward (ed.), *Derrida and Negative Theology* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1992) pp. 208–9.
21 Śaṅkara, *A Thousand Teachings*, pt 1, ch. 17, para. 22; p. 162.
22 Śaṅkara, *Vedānta Sūtras*, pt I, ch. 1, para. 1. Also in *A Thousand Teachings* Śaṅkara writes 'if he is dispassionate toward all things non-eternal which are attained by means [other than knowledge]; if he has abandoned the desire for sons, wealth, and worlds and reached the state of the *paramahaṃsa* wandering ascetic; if he is endowed with tranquility, self control, compassion, and so forth . . .'. (pt 2, ch. 1, para. 2), p. 211.

23 Murti, 'The Two Definitions of Brahman in the Advaita', p. 75.
24 Eric Lott, *Vedantic Approaches to God* (London: Macmillan, 1980) p. 173.
25 From Nikhilananda's translation of Śaṅkara's commentary of Gaudapāda's *Kārikā*, 3.1, as quoted by R. C. Zaehner, *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961) p. 169.
26 Lott, *Vedantic Approaches to God*, p. 177.
27 Śaṅkara, *A Thousand Teachings*, pt 2, ch. 1, para. 32; p. 221.
28 Nikhilananda, *Self-Knowledge*, p. 77.
29 Murti, 'The Two Definitions of Brahman in the Advaita', p. 75 and 76.
30 Fox, *Breakthrough*, p. 215.
31 Śaṅkara, *A Thousand Teachings*, pt 1, ch. 18, para. 222; p. 195. Also, pt 1, ch. 1, para. 15: 'Because of the incompatibility [of knowledge with action] a man who knows thus, being possessed of this knowledge, cannot perform action', and para. 21–2, pp. 104–5.
32 Karl H. Potter, *Advaita Vedānta up to Śaṃkara and His Pupils*, in *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, vol. III (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981) p. 36. For an excellent summary of this moral question surrounding the liberated Advaitin see pp. 32–8.
33 Julius Lipner, *The Face of Truth: A Study of Meaning and Metaphysics in the Vedāntic Theology of Rāmānuja* (London: Macmillan, 1986) p. 37.
34 Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, p. 113.
35 J. A. B. Van Buitenen (tr. and ed.), *Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1968) 5.24, p. 90. Van Buitenen notes that these qualities of *ātman* are 'nityatva, jñānatva, anandatva, akarmavaśyatva, etc.'.
36 Van Buitenen, *Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā*, 5.19, p. 90.
37 Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, p. 107.
38 Julius J. Lipner, 'Religion and Religions', G. Pargasarathi and D. P. Chattopadhyaya (eds.), *Radhakrishnan: Centenary Volume* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989) pp. 148–9.
39 Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, p. 108.
40 As translated by Van Buitenen, *Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā*, fn. 308, p. 103.
41 Lipner says: 'No doubt Rāmānuja requires an intuitive *ātmā*-vision even of the model votary of the Lord, the *jñānin* or knower. We recall that he says often enough that an essential prerequisite of ultimate communion with the Lord is Self-knowledge.' *The Face of Truth*, p. 108.
42 Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, p. 108.
43 Lipner, *The Face of Truth*, p. 109.
44 Van Buitenen, *Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā*, 7.16, p. 104, my emphasis. See also, 4.35, pp. 84–5; 5.18, 24–26, pp. 89 and 91; 5.28, p. 91; 6.29, p. 95; and 13.24–28, p. 145–6, for example, where he speaks of degrees of the *ātmā*-realization which seem to imply a monistic-theistic movement.

45 Van Buitenen, *Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā*, 2.72, p. 65–6.
46 Abhishiktānanda (Henri Le Saux), *Saccidānanda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience* (New Delhi: I.S.P.C.K., 1974) p. 65.
47 Sri Aurobindo Ghose, 'On Himself', *The Birth Centenary Library* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1971) 26: 426–7.
48 Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, *BCL*, 19: 902–3.
49 Jan Van Ruysbroek, *The Spiritual Espousals*, Eric Colledge (tr.) (New York: Harper & Row, 1953) p. 147.
50 Ruysbroek, *The Spiritual Espousals*, pp. 146–7.
51 Ruysbroek, *The Spiritual Espousals*, pp. 162–3.
52 Ruysbroek, *The Spiritual Espousals*, p. 162.
53 Ruysbroek, *The Spiritual Espousals*, pp. 166–7 and 173. R. C. Zaehner comments on Ruusbroec's reference to monistic and theistic experiences of Self: 'Though he obviously never heard of Vedāntin monism and could never have done so, Ruysbroek seems not only to know exactly what this state of "oneness without a second" is, but he describes is so accurately that one cannot but conclude that he is writing from actual experience. . . . However, as Ruysbroek rightly saw, such an emptying of the human person can only be the beginning of the mystical life for those who have experienced the grace of a personal God.' *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961) p. 170.
54 Ruysbroek, *The Book of Supreme Truth*, ch. 12, as quoted by W. T. Stace, in *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1961) pp. 95–6.
55 Abhishiktānanda, *Saccidānanda*, p. 87.
56 Abhishiktānanda, *Saccidānanda*, p. 83–4.
57 Louis Dupré, 'The Christian Experience of Mystical Union', *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 69, no. 1 (January 1989) p. 10.
58 Ruysbroek, *The Spiritual Espousals*, pp. 163.
59 Ruysbroek, *The Spiritual Espousals*, p. 136.
60 Ruysbroek, *The Spiritual Espousals*, p. 163.
61 Dupré, 'The Christian Experience of Mystical Union', p. 9.
62 Ruysbroek, *The Spiritual Espousals*, pp. 165–6.

4 The Dialectic of the Divine

1 Donald Evans, 'Can Philosophers Limit What Mystics Can Do?', *Religious Studies*, vol. 25, no. 3, (1989) pp. 57–8.
2 Louis Dupré, 'The Christian Experience of Mystical Union', *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 61, no. 1 (January 1989) p. 5.
3 John Macquarrie, *In Search of Deity* (New York: Crossroad, 1985).
4 Bonaventure, *The Journey of the Mind to God*, Jose de Vinck (tr.), *The Works of St. Bonaventure*, vol. I (Paterson, N.J.: St Anthony Guild Press, 1960). See also English translations by George Boas and Ewert Cousins.
5 Bonaventure, *Journey*, II, 11.
6 Quoting the Pseudo-Aeropagite, Bonaventure says 'As for you my friend, in regard to mystical visions, with your course now well

determined, forsake sense perception and discursive reasoning, all things visible and invisible, every non-being and every being; and as much as possible be restored, naked of knowledge, to union with the very One who is above all created essence and knowledge.' From *Journey*, VII, 7.

7 Aurobindo *The Life Divine, Birth Centenary Library* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1971) 19: 933. See also, for example, *Essays on the Gita, BCL*, 13: 218.

8 Aurobindo Ghose, *Essays on the Gita, BCL*, 13: 62–74.

9 Aurobindo, *The Life Divine, BCL*, 18: 333–41.

10 This section regarding the descriptive power of negative theology comes out of dialogue with Terence Penelhum. I am responding here both to Ninian Smart and Steven Katz. Smart suggests in *Reasons and Faiths*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), that this negative theology is purely valuational and non-descriptive. Steven Katz says, 'It becomes apparent on reflection that *different* metaphysical entities can be "described" by the same phrases if the phrases are *indefinite* enough. . . . While appearing to dileneate quite concrete phenomena these lists do not have the power to provide definite descriptions of any specific discrete phenomena: neither the claimed universal, common mystical experience nor anything else'. See 'Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism', S. Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (London: Sheldon Press, 1978) p. 51.

11 Nicholai Berdyaev, *'Ungrund and Freedom'*, in Jacob Boehme, *Six Theosophic Points and Other Writings*, John Rolleston Earle (tr.) (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1958) p. xi.

12 Krishna Sivaraman, 'God-Language and the Language of Nothing', *God the Self and Nothingness: Reflections Eastern and Western*, Robert E. Carter (ed.) (New York: Paragon House, 1990) pp. 156–7.

13 Ramakrishna, *Ramakrishna: Prophet of New India*, abridged from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Swami Nikhilananda (tr.) (New York: Harper, 1948) p. 26.

14 Robert McKim, 'Could God Have More Than One Nature?', *Faith and Philosophy*, vol. 5, no. 4 (October 1988) p. 392. In this essay McKim proposes that there might coherently be both personal and impersonal elements of the divine nature, and suggests that 'such would include attention to the extent to which religious experiences of different sorts provide support for the different conceptions' (p. 394). The theo-monistic experience does support the hypothesis McKim proposes, and its transformative elements also provide a synthesis of the impersonal-personal aspects.

15 Nicolas Berdyaev, *Spirit and Reality*, George Reavey (tr.) (London: G. Bles, 1939) p. 141.

16 *Bhagavad Gita*, from *The Gitabhashya of Ramanuja*, M. R. Sampatkumaran (tr.) (Madras: Professor M. Rangacharya Memorial Trust, 1969) 3.42–3, pp. 109–10.

17 J. A. B. Van Buitenen (tr. and ed.), *Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1968) 9.6, p. 114.
18 See George Thibaut's commentary on Śaṅkara's view in Śaṅkara, *The Vedānta Sūtras*, G. Thibaut (tr.), in F. Max Muller (ed.), *The Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 34, pt I (Oxford: 1890–96) p. xxv.
19 Swami Nikhilananda, *Self Knowledge of Sri Sankaracharya* (Mylapore, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math) pp. 8-87.
20 Aurobindo, *The Life Divine, BCL*, 18: 101.
21 Aurobindo, *The Life Divine, BCL*, 19: 908.
22 Aurobindo, *The Life Divine, BCL*, 18: 356.
23 Aurobindo, *The Life Divine, BCL*, 18: 352.
24 Aurobindo, *On Yoga, BCL*, 17: 47, and see also *The Life Divine, BCL*, 18: 352.
25 Aurobindo, *The Life Divine, BCL*, 19: 908.
26 Jacob Boehme, *The Three Principles of the Divine Essence*, John Sparrow (tr.) (1648), *The Works of Jacob Behmen, The Teutonic Theosopher*, vol. I (London: Pater-noster Row, 1764) c. 18.22.
27 Jacob Boehme, *The Highly Precious Gate of the Divine Intuition*, in *Six Theosophic Points and Other Writings*, John Rolleston Earle (tr.) (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1958), c. 3.44.
28 *Bhagavad Gita*, from *The Gitabhashya of Ramanuja*, M. R. Sampatkumaram (tr.), c. 3.38–9.
29 *The Three Principles*, especially c. 14.85–88. Also see Howard H. Brinton, *The Mystic Will: Based on a Study of the Philosophy of Jacob Boehme* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), pp. 182–202, for a fascinating detailed account of Wisdom in Boehme's theology.
30 Boehme, *On The Divine Intuition*, 4.4–5.
31 Karl Rahner *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, W. V. Dych (tr.) (New York: Seabury Press, 1978) p. 61.
32 Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, p. 34.
33 See Karl Rahner, 'The Concept of Existential Philosophy in Heidegger', Andrew Tallon (tr.) *Philosophy Today*, vol. 13, (1969) pp. 126–137.
34 Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, p. 75.
35 Karl Rahner, *The Practice of Faith: A Handbook of Contemporary Spirituality*, Karl Lehmann and Albert Raffelt (eds.) (New York: Crossroad, 1983) pp. 57–8, and *Foundations of Christian Faith*, p. 85.
36 Sivaraman, 'God-Language', p. 159.
37 Sivaraman, 'God-Language', p. 166.
38 S. P. Banerjee, 'God, Nothing, and the Ultimate', Robert E. Carter (ed.), *God, the Self, and Nothingness: Reflections Eastern and Western* (New York: Paragon House, 1990) p. 149.
39 Rahner, *The Practice of Faith*, p. 72.
40 Rahner, *The Practice of Faith*, p. 74.
41 Rahner, *The Practice of Faith*, pp. 70, 77. I should note that Rahner says that mysticism 'may signify a higher degree of the Christian

ascent to perfection from the standpoint of an objectively reflecting psychology' and so might have 'a paradigmatic character, an exemplary function to make clear to the Christian what really happens and is meant when his faith tells him that God's self-communication is given to him in grace and accepted in freedom whenever he believes, hopes, and loves' (p. 70). But from a theological standpoint, in contrast to the psychological, he speaks strongly against a mystic elitism and a mystic teleology, insisting that there are no substantial differences between non-mediated and mediated religious experiences (pp. 70, 77–8). I do not think his view on this issue is wholly consistent; either the mystic saint has achieved 'a higher degree of the Christian ascent to perfection' or she has not.

However, I should point out the apparent intimations of a theomonistic perspective in the writings of Bernard Lonergan. In 'Lonergan and the Foundation of a Contemporary Mystical Theology', *Lonergan Workshop*, vol. 5, Fred Lawrence, ed. (Chico, Cali.: Scholars Press, 1985) pp. 163–95, James Robertson Price III clarifies Lonergan's view of a non-intentional 'vital union of an individual's consciousness-as-consciousness with its conscious ground' (p. 188). This experience is the basis of a mystical consciousness which, I presume, informs the mystic's intentional categories (empirical, intellectual, rational, responsible) of religious consciousness. Although Price does not fully draw out the relationship between Lonergan's categories of intentional consciousness and mystical unity, he does begin to distinguish between Lonergan's mystical and religious consciousness, and he effectively clarifies Lonergan's view of the nature of the monistic 'apprehension of the transcendent grounding of one's intentionality' (p. 183) in vital unity.

42 Dupré, 'The Christian Experience of Mystical Union', p. 9.
43 Louis Dupré, *Transcendent Selfhood: the Loss and Rediscovery of the Inner Life* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976) p. 15.
44 Huston Smith, 'Philosophy, Theology, and the Primordial Claim', Robert E. Carter (ed.), *God, the Self and Nothingness*, p. 13.
45 Fox, *Breakthrough*, p. 328.
46 Julius Lipner, 'The Philosophy of Religion and the Spirit', *Radhakrishnan: Centenary Volume*, G. Parthasarathi and D. P. Chattopadhyaya (eds.) (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989) p. 149.
47 Van Buitenen, *Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā*, 2.53, p. 63.
48 Van Buitenen, *Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā*, 6.30, p. 95.
49 Van Buitenen, *Rāmānuja on the Bhagavadgītā*, 6.31, pp. 95–6.
50 Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, *BCL*, 13: 131–2.
51 The three gunas are the qualities of matter: *rajas* (desire, passion, action), *tamas* (darkness, obscurity, ignorance, inertia), and *sattva* (light, poise, peace). Auobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, *BCL*, 13: 134.
52 Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, *BCL*, 22: 283.
53 Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, *BCL*, 18: 352.
54 Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, *BCL*, 19: 904.

55 Aurobindo, *The Live Divine*, *BCL*, 19: 854. Regarding the movement from Self-realization to identity of essence, Aurobindo also says: 'When the inmost knowledge begins to come, we become aware of the psychic being within us and it comes forward and leads the sadhana [spiritual practice or discipline]. We become aware also of the Jivatman, the undivided Self or Spirit above the manifestation of which the psychic is the representative here.' (*Letters on Yoga*, *BCL*, 22: 270)
56 Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, *BCL*, 19: 902.
57 Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, *BCL*, 19: 906.
58 Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, *BCL*, 19: 902–3.
59 Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, *BCL*, 19: 904.
60 Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, *BCL*, 22: 280.
61 Boehme, *On The Divine Intuition*, c. 4.5.
62 Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, *BCL*, 19: 912–13.

5 The Theo-Monistic Hierarchy

1 Smart's distinction between the numinous and mystical logical strands of religion provides an intriguing model of contrast between predominantly *'bhakti'* (numinous) traditions and predominantly *'dhyāna'* (mystical) traditions. He sees the two strands effectively contrasted in terms of theological realism and idealism, the emphasis or deemphasis upon moral works, and the experiential knowledge or lack thereof. He argues the best religious traditions will effectively synthesize the two logical strands. See especially his *Reasons and Faiths* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), *Philosophers and Religious Truth* (London: SCM Press, 1964), and *The Yogi and the Devotee* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1968).
2 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, John W. Harvey, tr. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) pp. 6–7.
3 Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 29.
4 Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 24.
5 R. C. Zaehner quotes Vivekananda concerning the *kundalini* experience. 'At the lower end of the hollow canal is what the *Yogis* call the "Lotus of the *Kundalini*". They describe it as triangular in form, in which, in the symbolic language of the *Yogis*, there is a power called *Kundalini* coiled up. When that *Kundalini* awakes, it tries to force a passage through this hollow canal, and as it rises step by step, as it were, layer after layer of the mind becomes open and all the different visions and wonderful powers come to the *Yogi*. When it reaches the brain, the *Yogi* becomes perfectly detached from the body and mind; the soul finds itself free.' *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961) p. 97.
6 Aurobindo, *'On Yoga'*, *BCL*, 17: 47.
7 Howard H. Brinton, *The Mystic Will: Based on a Study of the Philosophy of Jacob Boehme* (New York: The Macmillan, 1930) pp. 123–4, 158, 176, 243.
8 Jacob Boehme, *The Three Principles of the Divine Essence*, John Spar-

row (tr.) (1648), *The Works of Jacob Behmen, The Teutonic Theosopher*, vol. 1 (London: Pater-noster Row, 1764), c. 1. 6, 8, 13.

9 Leonard Angel, *The Silence of the Mystic* (Toronto: Morgan House Graphics, 1983) p. 81.

10 Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (New York: New American Library, 1974) p. 176. Underhill discusses the conversion process on pp. 176–98.

11 Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 195.

12 I do not discuss in this book the various theodical issues pertaining to the theo-monistic typology. I direct the reader to my *Evil and the Mystics' God* (London: Macmillan, 1992), where I develop the mystic theodicy implicit to theo-monism, in response to the major problems I see associated with traditional non-mystical theodicies.

13 Angel, *The Silence of the Mystic*, p. 21.

14 Angel, *The Silence of the Mystic*, p. 31.

15 Angel, *The Silence of the Mystic*, p. 34. Although Angel neglects the theistic elements exuded in introvertive transformation, he does propose a typology that closely resembles theo-monistic mysticism. He outlines a 'natural theology of experience' that distinguishes between 'a naïve phase, a numinous phase, a mystical point, and a phase of incarnation'. He insists that the 'mystical itself has meaning only through a "return" phase, a phase of incarnation of sacred power, and a transmision of sacred knowledge.' (pp. 80–1)

16 Julius Lipner, 'Religion and Religions', *Radhakrishnan: Centenary Volume*, G. Parthasarathi and D. P. Chattopadhyaya (eds.) (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989) pp. 148–9.

17 Zaehner comments: 'For monism leads logically no farther than the Sāṁkhya position, the isolation of the "self" *qua* immortal soul from all that moves and has its being in space and time. Whether you call your soul an individual *puruṣa* or the Absolute *nirguṇa* or qualityless Brahman makes no difference.' *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane*, p. 146. On one level, I think Zaehner is correct to identify together Lipner's solipsistic mysticism and sublation mysticism. Both types are impersonal, static and non-differentiated experiences. Nevertheless, Rāmānuja, Aurobindo, Eckhart and Ruusbroec would appear to distinguish between progressive phases within monistic immersion, as the mystic moves towards theistic realizations.

18 Zaehner, *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane*, p. 174, as quoted from *The Spiritual Espousals*, p. 168.

19 Zaehner, *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane*, p. 173.

20 Although I find Zaehner's interpretation of nature mysticism very fascinating, I think it fails to explain adequately the outward-oriented focus of nature mysticism (Jung's psychology of self-integration is very introverted in nature), and it neglects the account of many mystic's who insist on a divine presence or permeation. I think there is something quite external to human unconsciousness and consciousness at play in nature mysticism.

21 Zaehner, *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane*, pp. 149–52.
22 Zaehner, *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane*, p. 204.
23 Zaehner, *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane*, p. 204.
24 Zaehner, *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane*, p. 174. Also see his reference to Ruusbroec's theo-monistic development, pp. 170, 185–6.
25 Matthew Fox (ed. and comm.), *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation* (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1980) p. 215.
26 Abhishiktānanda, *Saccidānanda*, (Delhi: I.S.P.C.K., 1974) p. 32.
27 In conversation.
28 Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, *BCL*, 19: 905–6, 909.
29 Jacob Boehme, *The Highly Precious Gate of the Divine Intuition*, in *Six Theosophic Points and Other Writings*, John Rolleston Earle (tr.) (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1958) c. 4.5.
30 Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, *BCL*, 22: 280.
31 Zaehner, *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane*, p. 29.
32 Zaehner, *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane*, p. 149.
33 Zaehner, *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane*, p. 105.
34 Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, *BCL*, 19: 909.
35 Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, *BCL*, 19: 906.
36 Jan Van Ruysbroek, *The Spiritual Espousals*, Eric Colledge (tr.) (New York: Harper & Row, 1953) pp. 146–7.
37 Fox, *Breakthrough*, p. 177. Emphasis is mine. I am indebted to Donald Evans, who brought this and the subsequent quotations and reading of Eckhart to my attention.
38 Fox, *Breakthrough*, p. 179.
39 Fox, *Breakthrough*, p. 392.
40 Fox, *Breakthrough*, p. 485.
41 Fox, *Breakthrough*, p. 485.
42 Fox, *Breakthrough*, p. 484.
43 Helen Ralston, *Christian Ashrams: A New Religious Movement* (Queenston, Ont.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1987) p. 36. See also pp. 32–37 and 92–4 for a brief history of this movement.
44 Abhishiktānanda, *Saccidānanda*, p. 78.
45 Abhishiktānanda, *Saccidānanda*, p. 168
46 Abhishiktānanda, *Saccidānanda*, p. 169.
47 Abhishiktānanda, *Saccidānanda*, p. 169.
48 Abhishiktānanda, *Saccidānanda*, p. 170.
49 Abhishiktānanda, *Saccidānanda*, p. 170.
50 Abhishiktānanda, *Saccidānanda*, p. 111.
51 Abhishiktānanda, *Saccidānanda*, p. 178.
52 Abhishiktānanda, *Saccidānanda*, p. 179.
53 Abhishiktānanda, *Saccidānanda*, p. 180.
54 Abhishiktānanda, *Saccidānanda*, p. 185.
55 Abhishiktānanda, *Saccidānanda*, p. 187.
56 A. C. Graham (tr.), *Chuang-Tzu: The Seven Inner Chapters and other writings from the book Chuang-tzu* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981) p. 18.
57 Graham, *Chuang-Tzu*, p. 35, en. 72.

58 Graham, *Chuang-Tzu*, p. 18. Further, Graham comments on the very difficult transformative processes, and the status of impersonal monistic mystics: ' "To leave off making footprints": it is easy to withdraw from the world as a hermit, hard to remain above the world while living in it' (note, p. 69).
59 Graham, *Chuang Tzu*, p. 157.
60 Graham, *Chuang-Tzu*, p. 18.
61 Roger J. Corless, 'The Brilliance of Emptiness: T'an-luan as a Mystic of Light', *The Pacific World*, N. S. no. 5 (1989) p. 15.
62 Corless, 'The Brilliance of Emptiness', p. 15.
63 Angel, *The Silence of the Mystic*, p. 24.
64 Corless, 'The Brilliance of Emptiness', pp. 15–16.
65 Corless, 'The Brilliance of Emptiness', p. 16.
66 Huston Smith, 'Philosophy, Theology, and the Primordial Claim', in *God, the Self, and Nothingness: Reflections Eastern and Western*, Robert E. Carter (ed.) (New York: Paragon House, 1990) p. 11.

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